BIGGER THAN EVER!!!

COMIC BOOKS

# COMICS FEATURE™

DECEMBER 1986
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ROY THOMAS
JAMES VAN HISE
AND HAPPY HAL

A COMPLETE GUIDE TO
COLLECTING COMICS

WHO WROTE THE WORDS?
LEE VS. KIRBY

THE GOLDEN AGE OF
THE BATMAN

THE DEFINITIVE
BULLWINKLE

AND INTRODUCING
INDEPENDENT LINE

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0 71896 48432 8

# HAPPY HAL'S HOWLINGS

Well we did it. We are now one of the two oldest magazines about comics that is published on any regular basis at all. We have also gained the record for the magazine about comics surviving in that inhospitable world outside of the comic book specialty stores. Others have tried it but just couldn't seem to draw enough of an audience to keep coming out.

To get perfectly serious for just one moment: Everyone here at **COMICS FEATURE** is both grateful and amazed that we can make the above boasts. When we first approached our national distributor almost three years ago we were told that they were interested in two of our three titles. The one they didn't want was **COMICS FEATURE**. And now, three years later, of the three, the one which caught on and survived was the one that they didn't want. We sincerely believe that the reason that this magazine has survived is a very simple one—you, the loyal reader. Somehow we seem to have reached out and established a very valuable type of communication, one which has emotionally enriched both sides. For that both the company and I, Happy Hal, are very, very thankful.

I do feel that the magazine has grown over the past couple of years and that we have consistently attracted an excellent group of writers and columnists. Much of the reason for this growth is due to you, our readers. You expressed an interest in seeing an active letters section and now we have one of the best, he humbly says. You told me that you wanted to read more about the publishers other than Marvel and DC—about the so-called independents—and this issue we introduce Independent Line. Amidst all of the self-congratulations and the cheers from many, many friends in the industry—many of whom were cooperative beyond the call of duty in helping us to create this special issue—I do stop and take stock and remember who the real editors are. You, the readers. And that just isn't a slogan but a reality.

Looking back there are a few milestones along the way and people to thank, people without whom this magazine would not be where it is today.

First there was Dean Mullaney, and without him there wouldn't even be a magazine. Dean and I brainstormed the creation of this new publication and what it should say and stand for. Today he is the publisher of his own comic book line, Eclipse Comics, and no one deserves to do well more.

In our second issue we scored a coup that helped to put us on the map. This fledgling publication, at a time when no one knew if it would live or die, was given a cover to use by no less a talent than Boris Vallejo, and for free. That is all we could afford!

With issue four came our first major news scoop. Peter Sanderson, the man responsible for virtually all of the special historical publications coming out of Marvel and DC to one degree or another, presented us with a story about the Phoenix ending that didn't happen—the one where she lived! And he provided us with pages of artwork to run with it, pages that had never seen print.

Issue six brought a change in editors as Carol Kalish and Richard Howell stepped into the breach when Dean went off to pursue his own projects. They directed the magazine to new levels of quality and then went on to pursue their own goals. Carol has been Direct Sales Manager of Marvel Comics for some years now and Richard is the penciller of the Hawkman comic book from DC.

When Richard and Carol moved on a new art director was needed and Bob Lewis crafted some of the best issues ever.

And when he left Jim Keegan and Ruth Kennedy stepped in and now they are planning our best issues yet. And they still await in the future.

There is one more name that must be mentioned. James Van Hise is the best contributing editor that any publication has ever had. His heroic efforts beyond the call of duty have resulted in more excellent pieces for this magazine than you could begin to imagine, including the special feature this issue! Many of Jim's best efforts are behind the scenes and you don't see them. But take Happy Hal's word for it, he's not only a fine writer/editor but a very good and much appreciated friend.

Well, sorry about all this boring stuff, but it is a special occasion for Ol' Happy Hal and I'm getting just a bit sentimental in my old age.

**HAPPY HAL**

# COMICS FEATURE

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**FUN & PROFIT**
A complete handbook to comic books as a collectible item—why to invest, how to invest and what to invest in. Plus a few cautionary notes. Mike Benton outdoes himself this time!
16

**SILVER AGE**
Stan Lee versus Jack Kirby. The controversy rages on. Who really created and wrote the early Marvel masterpieces? Will Jacobs and Gerard Jones offer a few insights that just may settle the matter for all time!
22

**STRIP SEARCH**
Ron Goulart continues his survey of the sci fi comic strips with Connie, Don Dixon, Speed Spaulding, John Carter and Wash Tubbs
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**GOLDEN AGE**
The Batman at war. Roy Thomas explains why the Dark Knight of Gotham stayed home for the duration.
56

**ANIMATED ANTICS**
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**GAMES**
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## FEATURES

# THE FUTURE OF COMIC BOOKS

A veritable who's who of the comic book industry gives their frank and honest opinion on both the state of comic books now and what the future will hold. Artists, writers, editors and publishers all offer their unguarded views on which comics are breaking new ground, which experiments are working or not working and why! The definitive piece on the state of the art in America.

# 34 INTRODUCING— INDEPENDENT LINE

Readers have clamored for more coverage of the independent, non-Marvel or DC comic books that are appearing. And Comics Feature is always happy to please its readers! Beginning this issue, and continuing in every issue for the forseeable future, there will be an exclusive magazine-within-a-magazine in Comics Feature. Each Independent Line will contain a news page, a feature on a company, important book or creator and a listing of all of the color comic books coming out from the myriad publishers. A complete magazine for everyone interested in what is happening besides the big two!

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# FEATURE NEWS

## ROY THOMAS TO WRITE NEW CAPTAIN MARVEL SERIES

Roy Thomas, **COMICS FEATURE**'s Golden Age columnist will co-author a new series of Captain Marvel adventures along with Dann Thomas. But there will be a difference.

It turns out that the Captain Marvel currently appearing in DC's **Legends** mini-series is not the Big Red Cheese that was the best-selling superhero of World War II. Instead he's a spanking new version who will receive his first solo outing as the star of a four-issue mini-series, **Shazam: A New Beginning**, that will begin release in January.

Due to an oversight on DC's part some years ago, Marvel Comics has the trademark on the name Captain Marvel, forcing DC use the magic word "SHAZAM" instead.

Tom Mandrake is handling the art chores while Roy will serve as his own editor along with Greg Weisman as assistant editor. Carl Gafford will be the colorist.

In the new version of the Captain there will be no Mary (Marvel) batson or Freddie (Captain Marvel Jr.) Freeman, no Mr. Tawny, the Talking Tiger, or Mr. Mind (perhaps the most unique villain in comic books since he is a worm!) and no Capt. Nazi, a villain that had definitely outlived his time. The only supporting characters for the new Captain will be those introduced into the mini-series by the Thomases.

The mini-series will largely take place in San Francisco and involve a 15-year old boy who is orphaned in an auto accident. A custody battle ensues between Billy's stage magician Uncle Dudley and a certain Dr. Thaddeus Bodog Sivana, who is after Billy's trust fund.

Sivana calls upon Black Adam and Billy meets Shazam who endows him with the expected set of powers. Only this time it isn't entirely clear where the powers came from since the wizard is even older than the Greek gods!

## FISH POLICE COLOR SPECIAL

Comics the Comic Company will release a special color edition of the very popular black-and-white series, **Fish Police**, which is currently being published by Fishwrap Productions.

The special will feature 40 pages of all new story and art from Fish Police creator Steve Moncuse.

"It's our humble opinion that **Fish Police** is one of the most entertaining comic series being produced today, black-and-white or otherwise," comments Editor-In-Chief Diana Schutz. "I'm really happy to be working with Steve again and expect this project to be alot of fun." Both Schutz and Moncuse are enthusiastic about this appearance of the normally black-and-white series in a color format.

## NEW SPIDER-EDITOR

Jim Salicrup has received the nod to become the head honcho of the Spider-Man stable of books. He will be editing **Peter Parker**, **The Spectacular Spider-Man**, **Amazing Spider-Man** and **Web of Spider-Man**. When **Comics Feature** contributing editor James Van Hise spoke to him, he indicated that his plans were not yet firm and that many changes could be expected. One rumored change is that Spider-Man will adopt yet another new costume, different from either of the two that readers have seen until now.

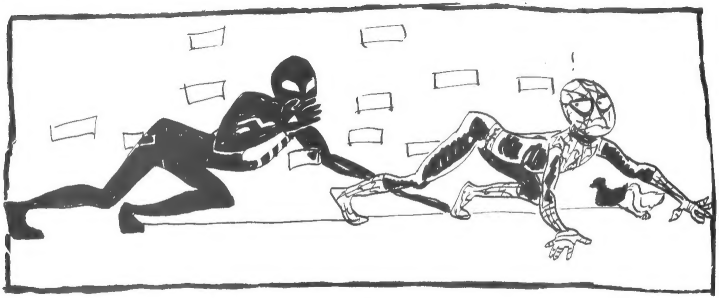
Although there is currently a scheduling problem requiring that some issues be filled from inventory, tentative new teams have been chosen.

**Amazing Spider-Man** will be written by David Michelinie, drawn by John Romita Jr. and inked by Bob Layton; **Peter Parker** will be written by J. M. DeMatteis, drawn by Mike Zeck and inked by Bob McLeod; **Web of Spider-Man** will be written by Jim Owsley, drawn by Steve Geiger and inked by Vince Colletta. Presumably this means that former Spider-Editor, and currently Spider-Writer Tom DeFalco and Peter David will no longer pen any of Peter Parker's myriad adventures. It must be stressed, though, that as of the time of this writing, these line-ups are still not definite.

There will be one special future adventure of the wallcrawler written by Peter David appearing in a double-size issue of **Amazing Spider-Man**. Salicrup notes that the creative teams had already been chosen before he became editor and that he simply went along with the existing plans.

**The Comic Buyers Guide** has asked Salicrup whether Peter Parker will marry Mary Jane—this was a suggestion made by former **COMICS FEATURE** columnist Stan Lee—and his response was, "I think it's a great idea. Unfortunately, I wish nobody had ever said anything about this at conventions.

"It won't be much of a surprise years from now, when it happens."



# LETTERS

Send all comments & correspondence to:
LETTERS
COMICS FEATURE
8399 Topanga Cyn Blvd
Canoga Park, CA 91304

*While it's still too soon to start running the scorecard...not enough responses yet, I did think that this early reply was worth running...it's a great example of how to respond if you have the time...and we will print the best of the responses...*

Dear Hal,

Here it comes. Another of those "constructive" critiques that have become almost commonplace in the pages of fanzines and comics alike. You all know the type.

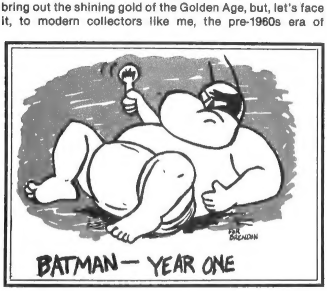
ANIMATED ANTICS—This gives the average collector a small idea about how far the art of animation has come in all the years it has been around. A definite do—able with the right twists.

FEATURE NEWS—this is just perfect for the people (like myself) who are very heavily into the collecting of new comics, and need to be able to see a little bit in front of them in order to plan the monthly diet of comics. By this I mean any major twists in plot that will be hot right away (the obvious example being the Mutant Massacre), or changes on the creative teams of my favorites, and the like. Thumbs up!

FUN & PROFIT—Mike Benton certainly knows what he's talking about. Thanks to the tips he's left here and there in his columns, I believe that the value of my collection has risen by at least 10 percent or more. Hip hip hooray had a casionally Kirby would throw in ideas of his own in the hearty "Excelsior!!"

GAMES—To any person who plays these fantasy games, this column is a special treat. It offers news and reviews to the role-playing crowd. It's loaded with knowledge in its own way.

GOLDEN AGE—I know that Roy Thomas tries his best to bring out the shining gold of the Golden Age, but, let's face it, to modern collectors like me, the pre-1960s era of comics just does not radiate the excitement level we look for today.




HAL'S HOWLINGS—Correspondents just do not give as much attention to the Howler as is deserved. He has spearheaded what is most likely the best (as far as accessibility) fanzine in the last few years. In areas like where I buy my comics, CF is the only outlet to the huge comics industry that has developed today. Hal, as the editor, is entitled to a little howling in each issue. After all, this is HIS baby. Hal's Howlings has got to be the best editorials that I've read anywhere in a long time. He knows how to cover the bases.

HEROES—An eternal favourite for anyone who has a favourite hero (Heaven help anyone who doesn't). Heroes presents a full history of what happened to the hero and why. Four stars. (Just as a point of interest, how about the other end of the scale...have a VILLAINS column. Everyone has a favourite villain, too, I'm quite sure.)

LETTERS— What can be said about Letters that hasn't been said (except of course for the right name. How about COMMENTS FEATURED?). It is simply comments, suggestions and critiques from the readers. Nothing to improve or slack upon.

LISTINGS—A must to keep. Collectors like me don't get the chance to plan ahead too far with the 'checklists' given by the individual companies. This way, we can plan ahead with our wallets.

SILVER AGE—This column is more in tune with the modern collector. I would like to see coverage include the early-mid '70s even though this period isn't *really* true SA.

STRIP SEARCH—Great. If you want to have something to read when all of your frantic business is done, SS is perfect. It gives an insight into all of the old favorites in the papers of yesterday.

That's it for now. Keep up the standards of excellence you've achieved, and I'll remain a devoted fan of the Feature.

Bill Ranger
RR No. 4
Lenark, Ont. CANADA
K0G 1K0

*Bill—This might seem a bit ungrateful after all of the praise you have heaped on both the magazine and me, but it's your comments about Golden Age that most caught my eye. Or perhaps that's just human nature to react to the negative! When I first became heavily involved with organized comic book fandom—or perhaps we weren't all that organized!—the Golden Age was all the rage. We were*

*sitting about 25 years after the height of popularity of those books and everyone was just dying of curiosity about those comics of the past. Now we are sitting at about that distance from the beginnings of the Silver Age, the early days of the rebirth of the superhero at DC and the growth of Marvel. That may mean that the Golden Age is a bit too far in the past to be of interest. None of the companies except for Marvel/Timely and DC that published adventure comics in those days is still around. And DC has virtually disowned its past while the vast majority of Marvel heroes owe no link to those days. Teams such as the Invaders, Liberty Legion, Freedom Fighters and so on have disappeared from the scene. Even Roy's JSA is about to vanish to be replaced by some other version he is crafting—the details on this are not yet clear. DC even seems to be distancing themselves from their Silver Age books, revamping much of the line. Perhaps the Golden Age is a relic with no living interest, but it certainly seems that someone should chronicle for posterity the early days of our favorite hobby. It almost seems Orwellian to allow this material to vanish from the record while the companies themselves pretend that those tales never took place. The nice thing about being an editor is—as much as you work to please your readers—you can also sometimes please yourself. And so, albeit bi-monthly, we will keep the column.—Hardnosed Hal*

*Dear Hal,*

*After your drastic improvements in* **COMICS FEATURE** I figured the least I could do was respond to your plea and write in. I have just finished issue 47 and your magazine looks great.

The two features this issue were very interesting, especially the interview with Doug Murray. I found it very insightful. I'd really enjoy more interviews like this one. Could you do a feature on DC's **Legends** and other events they're planning?

Now that you're monthly, is there a chance of a larger news section? I like the information in this as I do in your Comics Consumer Guide. Don't even think of getting rid of either of these!

Martin Cannon's covers are stupendous. Has his work been in any comics? My only gripe is the last four covers have been Marvel. Please, more DC. They're my favourites. How about Comical Notes, Comic Rebuttal or Fandom Features for the letter column.

Well, Hal, I wrote in, commented on the covers and participated in all three contests. Does that fill my quota for this month?

Kyle Dunlop
Box 5067
Townsend, Ont. Canada
N0A 1S0

P.S. Early congratulations on reaching your fiftieth issue!

*Kyle—Thanks for the anniversary congrats and your letter, which is appearing in the anniversary issue. I hope you enjoyed our last issue when we checked in on Miller's Batman and Byrne's Superman. We hope to cover the upcoming Wonder Woman by checking in with George Perez, but DC coverage is far more difficult to arrange than Marvel. They actively discourage it!*

## And your favorite hero is...

It's time to announce the winner in the fabulous, stupendous, exclusive **COMICS FEATURE** Name-Your-Favorite Hero contest...and the winner is:

**WOLVERINE!**

What—no shocked gasps of amazement and surprise? It seems that our readers are pretty typical of comic fans as a whole and one of Marvel's band of Merry Mutants walks off with the honors. The list of top favorites ran as follows:

1) Wolverine
2) Spider-Man
3) Punisher—Marvel take note!

A whole bunch of heroes tied for fourth place, including Superman, Groo, Vigilante, Howard the Duck, Flash, Captain America, Sensor Girl, Daredevil, Sun Boy, Thor, Warlock, Silver Surfer, Scarlet Witch, Cannonball, Rogue, Nighthawk and Isis (?!).

And that's the way it went up 'till this point.

While we are announcing the results as promised in this issue we will give an update as more responses come in. I won't promise what issue that'll appear in but stay tuned and keep sending the entries in if you haven't already!

# Comics Consumer Guide

## DC COMICS

### 10/7/86 Shipping

□**ANGEL LOVE #7—**
(Barbara Slate) Angel finds her sister.

□**DEMON #2—**
(of 4) (Wagner/Nichols) Etrigan hunts Belial.

□**HEX #18—**
(Last issue) (Fleisher/Garzon/Giffen-Carson)

### 10/14/86 Shipping

□**DARK KNIGHT TRADEPAPERBACK—**

□**FURY OF FIRESTORM #66—**
(Legends tie in) (Ostrander/Brozowski/Mitchell)

□**JUSTICE LEAGUE OF AMERICA #259—**
(Legends tie in) (DeMatteis/McDonnell/Smith) Part 2 of the end of the JLA.

□**TALES OF THE TEEN TITANS #74—**
Reprints New Teen Titans 15.

□**VIGILANTE #38—**
(Kupperberg/Smith/Magyar/Grell) Guest starring Peacemaker.

□**WATCHMEN #6—**
(of 12) (Moore/Gibbons) The story of Rorschach.

Direct sales only.

□**WONDER WOMAN #1—**
(Potter/Perez/Patterson) The legend reborn!

### 10/21/86 Shipping

□**BATMAN #404—**
(Miller/Mazzucchelli) Part one of four, Batman: Year One.

□**BLUE BEETLE #6—**
(Wein/Cullins/Barras) Versus Chronos.

□**ELECTRIC WARRIOR #10—**
(Moench/Balkie/Marcos) Direct sales only.

□**LEGION OF SUPERHEROES #31—**
(Levitz/LaRocque/DeCarlo/Lightle) First Projectra adventure recalled, plus Karate Kid and Ferro Lad.

Direct sales only.

□**SGT. ROCK #414—**
(Kanigher/A. Kubert/J. Kubert)

□**SECRET ORIGINS #11—**

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(Hawkman, Power Girl) (Thomas/Kupperberg/McDonnell & Wilshire/DeZuniga/Ordway)

□**STAR TREK #35—**
(Wein/Sutton/Villagran/Brozowski-Smith)

□**SUPERMAN #2—**
(Byrne) Luthor discovers the Man of Steel's identity.

### 10/28/86 Shipping

□**ADVENTURES OF THE OUTSIDERS #42—**
(Barr/Aparo) Reprints #4.

□**ADVENTURES OF SUPERMAN #425—**
(Wolfman/Ordway/Machlan)

□**BOOSTER GOLD #13—**
(Jurgens/DeCarlo)

□**GREEN LANTERN CORPS #209—**
(Englehart/Staton/Farmer/Patterson) Re-Introducing Star Sapphire, Hector Hammond and Guy Gardner.

□**INFINITY, INC. #35—**
(Roy & Dann Thomas/McFarlane/DeZuniga) Global Guardians guest star!

Direct sales only.

□**NEW TEEN TITANS #28—**
(Wolfman/Barreto/Tanghal) Brother Blood Resurrected. Direct sales only.

□**SWAMP THING #57—**
(Moore/Veitch/Alcala/Bissette) Detour to Rann, home of Adam Strange. Part one of two.

□**WARLORD #114—**
(Legends tie in) (Fleisher/Randall/Grindberg) DeSaad comes to Skartaris.

□**WHO'S WHO #24—**

### 11/4/86 Shipping

□**ACTION #585—**
(Byrne/Giordano) Superman meets Phantom Stranger.

□**ALL STAR SQUADRON #66—**
(Thomas/Kupperberg/DeZuniga/Jones) Origin of Tarantula...guest starring Sandman.

□**COSMIC BOY #3—**
(Levitz & Giffen/Colon/Smith/Lightle)

□**DETECTIVE #571—**
(Barr/Davis/Neary) Scarecrow's back.

□**HAWKMAN #7—**
(Isabella/Howell/Heck)

□**HISTORY OF THE DC UNIVERSE #2—**
(Wolfman/Perez/Kesel) Direct sales only.

□**LEGENDS #4—**
(of 6) (Ostrander & Wein/Byrne/Kesel)

□**LITTLE SHOPPE OF HORRORS SPECIAL 1—**
(Fleisher/Colan/Hunt) 64 page adaptation of the cult movie.

□**THE QUESTION #1—**
(O'Neil/Colon) Direct sales only.

□**TALES OF THE LEGION #344—**
(Levitz/LaRocque/Mahlstedt/Lightle)Reprint # 19.

□**TEEN TITANS SPOTLIGHT #7—**
(Baron/Guice/Patterson) Hawk.

# MARVEL COMICS

## 10/7/86 Shipping

☐**DAKOTA NORTH #5—**
(Thomases/Salmons)

☐**DAREDEVIL #239—**
(Nocenti/Williams/Williamson) Part one of two. Guest starring Black Widow.

☐**G.I. JOE SPECIAL MISSIONS #3—**
(Hama/Trimpe/Zeck) Battle Mid-East dictator.

☐**STRIKEFORCE: MORITURI #3—**
(Gillis/Anderson/Williams/Anderson)

☐**NEW MUTANTS #46—**
(Claremont/Guice/Baker/Windsor-Smith) Four of the mutants go to the future controlled by the Sentinels, where mutants are hunted.

☐**NIGHT MASK #4—**
(Goodwin/Colon)

☐**PSI FORCE #4—**
(Perry/Texeira/Barta/Texeira & Barta) Network rejoins Psi Force.

☐**TRANSFORMER MOVIE #3—**
(of 3) (Macchio/Perlin/Akin & Garvey)

☐ **WEB OF SPIDER-MAN #23—**
(Michelinie/?) The second part of Raging Fire.

☐**WEST COAST AVENGERS #17—**
(Englehart/Milgrom/Sinnott/Milgrom & Sinnott) Beginning a multi-part adventure.

☐**COMET MAN #1—**
(Bill Mumy & Miguel Ferrar/Jones/Talaoc/Slenklewicz) (of 6)

☐**CONAN ANNUAL #10—**
(Owsley/Chan)

## 10/14/86 Shipping

☐**ALPHA FLIGHT #43—**
(Mantlo/Ross/Portacio) Vs. Sentinels, Mesmero and Sebastian Shaw. Plus Scramble.

☐**AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #285—**
(DeFalco/?)Part two of Gang War trilogy.

☐**CAPTAIN AMERICA #328—**
(Gruenwald/Neary/Beatty/Neary)

☐**DR. STRANGE #61—**
(Gillis/Warner/Emberlin/Warner) Introducing Rintah, a new supporting character.

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☐**G.I. JOE VS. TRANSFORMERS #2—**
(of 4) (Higgins/Trimpe/Colleta) All Marvel's toys try to break each other!

☐**KICKERS, INC. #4—**
(DeFalco/Frenz) Return of Fist.

☐**MERC #4—**
(David/Morrow)

☐ **POWER PACK –8—**
(L. Simonson/Shoemaker/Barta) Direct sales only.

☐**AVENGERS INDEX #1—**

☐**FANTASTIC FOUR VS. THE X-MEN #1—**
(of 4)
(Claremont/Bogdanove/Austin/Bogdanove)

☐**SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN #132—**
(Yakata/Kwapisz/Chan/Jusko) B&W mag.

☐**MARVEL AGE #47—**

☐**AVENGERS #276—**
(Stern/J. Buscema/Palmer/J. Buscema & Palmer) Shroud, Dr. Druid, Thor & Antman.

☐**CONAN THE BARBARIAN #191—**
(Owsley/Semeiks/Isherwood)

☐**D.P. 7 #4—**
(Gruenwald/Ryan/Tanghal)

☐**G.I. JOE #56—**
(Hama/Whigham/Mushynsky)

☐**HOWARD THE DUCK #3—**
(of 3) (Fingeroth/Baker)

☐**INCREDIBLE HULK #328—**
(Milgrom)

☐**JUSTICE #4—**
(Englehart/Isherwood)

☐**MARVEL TALES #196—**
Reprints Marvel Team-Up #62.

☐**THE 'NAM #3—**
(Murray/Golden/Gil/Golden)

☐**X-MEN #214—**
(Claremont/Windsor-Smith/Wiacek/Windsor-Smith) The aftermath guest-starring Dazzler and Lila Cheney, with that malicious Malice.

☐**MARVEL SAGA #15—**

☐**TRANSFORMERS UNIVERSE #3**

☐**SPIDER-MAN VS. WOLVERINE #1—**
(Owsley/Bright/Williamson)

☐**ALIEN LEGION GRAPHIC NOVEL—**
(Potts & Zelentz/Cirocco/Austin/Oliff)

## 10/28/86 Shipping

☐**FANTASTIC FOUR #299—**
(Stern/J. Buscema/S. Buscema/J & S Buscema) Thing vs. She-Hulk.

☐**IRON MAN #215—**
(Michelinie/Bright/Layton/Bright & Layton)

☐**PETER PARKER #123—**
(David/?) Part one of two resolving Cat.

☐**SPITFIRE #6—**
(Conway/Trimpe) Spitfire accused of murder.

☐**STAR BRAND #5—**
(Shooter/Romita, Jr.) Star Brand vs. Kadaffy!

☐**THOR #378—**
(W. Simonson/S. Buscema)

☐**TRANSFORMERS #25—**
(Budiansky/Perlin/Garvey/Trimpe)

☐**X-FACTOR #13—**
(L. Simonson/W. Simonson/D. Green/W. Simonson) Cyclops vs. a Sentinel.

☐**CLASSIC X-MEN #6—**

☐**THE G.I. JOE ORDER OF BATTLE #4—**

☐**HANDBOOK OF THE MARVEL UNIVERSE #15—**

☐**G.I. JOE DIGEST #2**

# COMICS FILE MAGAZINE

The first definitive series about the superheroic myths of the modern world—comic books! Every issue combines a careful analysis of the individual hero or team as they appear within the comic books that chronicle them along with a guide to key events in their history and interviews with the artists, writers and editors that have played a major role in their creation.

Comic book historian James Van Hise, former editor of one of the oldest publications about comic books ever and a widely published author on popular entertainment, as well as a contributing editor of Comics Feature, is the main author of the series. Additional material has been provided by such diverse and talented individuals as Roy Thomas, Ron Goulart and John Peel.

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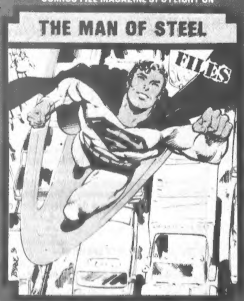


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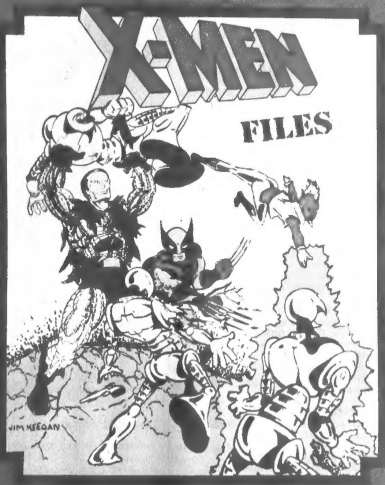


## COLLECT THE WHOLE SET!

# Independent Line

## NOW COMICS LAUNCHES VALOR

Now Comics will be releasing a full color three issue mini-series starring a unique space pirate and his crew of semi-organic com-bots.

Valor Thunderstar flees his dimension when he discovers that the com-bats won in an intergalactic poker game were not his opponent's but the Lord Emperor's treasured possessions. Along with the Fireflies (his nickname for the com-bats), he attempts to elude the Imperial Guard, crashing on the outskirts of Cincinnati, OH.

The series is created by Jonathan Carr, who will be writing and pencilling the mini-series, Don Drake, who will be handling the inking. The cover is by Jerry Ordway. The second issue will sport a cover by Bill Reinhold.

## NEW GRAPHIC NOVELS FROM DONNING

Three new graphic adventure series are planned for release by Starblaze Graphics, a division of Donning. **Aria** and **Thorgvall** are both by Michael E. Weyland, Jean Van Hamme and Grzegorz Rosinski. Both series originally appeared in Belgian editions.

**Aria** is about an emancipated woman warrior who emerges fighting and laughing from a barbarian world. Hers is a time when women are not allowed to ride horses, much less carry weapons and command armies. Aria doesn't follow the rules.

**Thorgvall—Child of the Stars** is about an abandoned child left on a storm-maddened sea who is found and raised by Leif Haraldson as a child of Aegir, mighty god of the oceans, and an envoy of the thunder god Thor. As Thorgvall grows to manhood he finds himself growing apart from his family and friends, and in the first volume, begins a guest for his own identity.

Yet another new Donning graphic novel series is **Fortune's Friends**, written by Kay and Mike Reynolds and illustrated by Colleen Doran. The story centers on the activities at the Franklin Fortune Detective Agency and features naive and idealistic Liz Monroe, who is determined to become a detective—even if it kills her.

Writer/artist Kay Reynolds is the co-author of **Robotech Art** 1. Mike Reynold's, Kay's brother, brings his experiences as a police officer for the Port Authority of Norfolk, VA to the series. Colleen Doran is the artist/creator of **A Distant Soil** and has also illustrated for Marvel (**Swords of the Swashbucklers**), DC (**Amethyst**) and First Comics (**Munden's Bar**). Jane Fancher, the colorist for the **Elfquest** volumes 2 and 3, will handle the coloring;while Bob Pinaha will supply the lettering. This series is original and not reprint.

## THE TITAN MOORE

Titan Books plans to release six compilations of Alan Moore's most popular stories between October and December of 1986.

Moore, of course is the writer responsible for the revolution in DC's **Swamp Thing** series as well as their **Watchmen** maxi-series.

First on the schedule will be three collections of his Halo Jones stories, about a particularly normal woman attempting to cope with a chaotic future brimming with social problems: 95% unemployment, segregated cities for the poor, interstellar wars fought mostly by women, death defying shopping expeditions. Ian Gibson, who has also drawn Robo-Hunter, is the artist.

**D.R. and Quinch's Guide to Life** is next up. **Alan Outolders** Davis handles the art on this one.

Finally there are **Shocking Futures** and **Twisted Tales**, two anthologies of Moore's favorite stories from **2000 AD**. The publisher describes these as "a subtle blend of O. Henry and **Tales from the Crypt**." Dave Gibbons, Kevin O'Neil and Steve Dillon are just a few of the artists in these volumes.

## GARCIA LOPEZ ON NEXUS

Jose Garcia Lopez, one of the most respected pencillers in the comic book field, with such books as **Superman**, **Batman**, **Atari Force** and **Teen Titans** to his credit, will be doing a fill-in issue of **Nexus** for First Comics.

Lopez will be drawing issue 30 from a script by Mike Baron. The following two issues are by Gerald Forton and Jackson Guice, respectively. With issue 33, Steve Rude returns as the regular artist.

Meanwhile, also at First, Mark DeMatteis will become the regular writer on **American Flagg**.

# COMICO

## THE NEWEST MAJOR ON THE BLOCK

Comico Comics is one of the newer independent publishers. Starting without fanfare a few years ago with but a handful of poorly received black and white titles, they have carefully begun to carve out a niche for themselves in the comic book publishing industry. They recently received a shot in the arm when they chose to publish a monthly comic adaptation of the old **Jonny Quest** cartoon series (the first JQ comic since a one-shot published by Gold Key 20 years ago!). Clearly it was just the kind of thing that fans had been waiting for and it received a very enthusiastic response from both fans and professionals. Conceived over a year ago, the title has begun to appear only recently, in fact just a couple of months before new episodes of the cartoon series began to air in television syndication. Even the old episodes are back again, both on the air and in videotapes. Talk about good timing!

"Primarily we want to set trends, not follow them," says Bob Schreck, chief spokesman for Comico. "We think that we've been doing that. We even have a humorous little motto from the fact that we did black and whites a few years ago that didn't go over too well in the marketplace. Our tag line for that is—*We were doing B&W's when nobody cared*! Thank goodness we're doing color now that people are caring.

"Our future is a committment to the highest possible quality that we can provide to the highest possible amount of love that we can put into a project. We've been frightening a lot of artists and writers these last few months by coming up to them and sincerely saying, 'We don't want to do this unless you want to do it, because if it were done by anyone else it would just be a sham...a commercial ploy.' Witness Bill Loebs, Doug Wildey and all the other great people we have lined up on **Jonny Quest**. If we see somebody that can do **Jonny Quest** their own special way, we let them. We don't have or want a house style.

"Any other publisher would have gone after **Space Ghost** as a 12 issue series, but Comico said, 'The only person who can do Space Ghost is Steve Rude.' That's it. When Steve said that he can only do a one-shot, that's what we went with. That's what we're trying to do with **Jonny Quest**, make sure that each and every issue is something that people can be proud of.

"Our future is to plan sanely, make as many of the right moves we can, and provide the highest quality level of entertainment that we possibly can. Right now limited series are hot. We don't care what formats sell—formats are formats—as long as we get the reader something that's interesting, they're going to react."

What does Comico look for when deciding what to publish? How do they decide which directions to take?

"Anything that encompasses real characterization. We're looking for something that's unique, not something that's been done before." Schreck cites **Mage** as an example of the sort of unusual fare they search out. "We're looking for a new approach to comics, not the same old tired approach. We had a gut reaction last year that **Jonny Quest** would be a good property and the sky's the limit! The series is selling phenomenally. The fans have reacted to it beyond our wildest dreams."

The near future will add other new titles to the Comico line, including the long-awaited return of Dave Stevens' popular Rocketeer.

"Next year we'll have out the **Rocketeer Adventure Magazine** by Dave Stevens and Mike Kaluta. We're also doing a **Robotech** 3-D comic and next June will see the **Rio** graphic novel by Doug Wildey. Matt Wagner's new series, **Grendel**, has an art team that is high, high fashion. They actually work for Nike as designers of clothing and these guys are unknowns but every professional who's seen their art thinks that these guys are going to be the hot team next year. They're the Panda brothers and they'll be producing the **Grendel** series which comes out in October.

"Picking something that's different and that hasn't been done before is not easy," Schreck observes, "but so far so good!"

And the company behind these diverse projects—as well as the three comics based on the **Robotech** cartoon series, and the superhero team books, **Elementals** and **Justice Machine**—has taken on yet another challenge. Just this past spring they joined the big boys of action/adventure comic books, Marvel and DC, by becoming the only other company to make their books available outside of the comic book specialty stores. Comico hopes that their books can be found in drugstores, supermarkets, convenience stores, bookstores and newsstands, in fact, everyplace that you can find your favorite Marvel and DC comic books.

This is indeed one independent line with vision—and guts!

**CF**

XMAGE TM and © 1986 Matt Wagner

## COMICO

- ☐ELEMENTALS #10—
- ☐JONNY QUEST
- ☐ROBOTECH: THE NEW GENERATION #11—
- ☐GRENDEL #2—
- ☐ROBOTECH: THE MACROSS SAGA #15
- ☐THE WORLD OF GINGER FOX—

## CONTINUITY

- ☐ECHOES OF FUTUREPAST #10—
- ☐TOY BOY #1—

## ECLIPSE

- ☐SCOUT #2—
- ☐ALIEN ENCOUNTERS #5—
- ☐AIRBOY #7—
- ☐XXXINVERSE #2—
- ☐ LUMEN #1
- ☐THE NEW WAVE #9—
- ☐MR. MONSTER'S TRUE CRIME #2—
- ☐WHOOOIIIIT? #2—
- ☐HAMSTERS 3-D #3—
- ☐AIRBOY #8—
- ☐CHAMPIONS #5
- ☐THE NEW DRAGENTS 4—
- ☐MIRACLEMAN #11 —
- ☐THE NEW WAVE #10—
- ☐SHATTER #7—

## QUALITY

- ☐STEEL CLAW #3—
- ☐JUDGE DREDD #5—
- ☐ROGUE TROOPER #5—
- ☐2000 AD #11—
- ☐SAM SLADE #5—
- ☐SPELLBINDERS #3—

## MISC.

- ☐HAMSTER VICE 3-D #1 (Blackthorne)—
- ☐ELFLORD #2 (Aircell)—
- ☐EPSILON WAVE #10 (Elite)—
- ☐BEADRAGON #6 (Elite)—
- ☐TWILIGHT AVENGER #3 (Elite)—
- ☐B.I. ROBOT #1 (Eternity)—
- ☐DOOMSDAY #6 (Fantagraphics)—
- ☐FLESH & BONES #3 (Fantagraphics)—
- ☐MIRACLE SQUAD #2 (Fantagraphics)—
- ☐CHROME #1 (Hot)—
- ☐THE SATURDAY KNIGHTS #1 (Hot)—
- ☐SYPHONS #3 (New)—
- ☐VALOR THUNDERSTAR #1 (New)—
- ☐VECTOR #3 (New)—
- ☐STREETFIGHTER #2 (Ocean)—
- ☐ETERNITY SMITH #3 (Renegade)—
- ☐TERRAFORMERS #2 (Sirius)—
- ☐THE FINAL CYCLE GRAPHIC NOVEL (Sirius)—

## FIRST

- ☐NEXUS #29—
- ☐BADGER #20—
- ☐GRIMJACK #31—
- ☐WHISPER #5—
- ☐GHOSTBUSTERS ☆—
- ☐AMERICAN FLAG! #37—
- ☐DYNAMO JOE #4—
- ☐JON SABLE, FREELANCE #44—
- ☐ELRIC: WEIRD OF THE WHITE WOLF #3—

## EPIC

- ☐MOON&SHADOW #11
- ☐GROO THE WANDERER 24—
- ELEKTRA: ASSASSIN #5—
- ALIEN LEGION #17—
- ☐ELFQUEST #19—
- ☐STEELGRIP STARKEY #5—

# FILES MAGAZINES Library

(All files magazines are perfect bound with color covers and at least 80 pages)

## THE STAR TREK FILES

Go where no fan has gone before in a fantastically detailed and completely unique series devoted to everyone's favorite science fiction show. Gene Roddenberry's creation is showcased in cast biographies, character profiles, interviews, accurate episode guides and much more. This is one series you simply cannot afford to miss!

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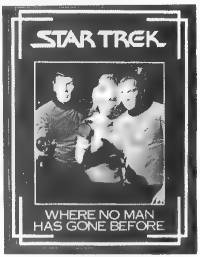
**STAR TREK FILE TWO..... TIME PASSAGES**
**STAR TREK FILE THREE..... A TASTE OF PARADISE**
**STAR TREK FILE FOUR... ON THE EDGE OF FOREVER**
**STAR TREK FILE FIVE..... MISSION: YEAR TWO**
**STAR TREK FILE SIX..... JOURNEY TO ETERNITY**
**STAR TREK FILE SEVEN..... THE DEADLY YEARS**
**STAR TREK FILE EIGHT.... RETURN TO TOMORROW**

*(The above files are $5.95 each.)*




And then came the movies when the fans of the show simply would not let it die! The adventure continues in a series of episodes even more elaborate in the production and special effects. These volumes combine interviews with story synopsis and perceptive analysis to retell the continuing Star Trek adventure.

**STAR TREK MOVIE FILE ONE. THE MOTION PICTURE**
**STAR TREK MOVIE FILE TWO.... WRATH OF KHAN**
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**THE DARK SHADOWS FILE ONE.... COLLINWOOD**
**THE DARK SHADOWS FILE TWO..... RETURN**

*(The above volumes are $5.95 each)*

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# FUN & PROFIT

BY MIKE BENTON

If you are a typical comic collector, you spend over $1,000 per year on your hobby.

Since most collectors buy and read comics for a period of three to seven years, you will probably invest at least $5,000 in comic books and related materials.

Advanced collectors who actively track down back issues assemble collections that generally cost them $10,000 to $20,000.

Like it or not, you *already* are a comic book investor.

Now the question is: Are you a smart investor?

## COLLECTIBLE INVESTMENTS

As investment items, comic books are classified as collectibles — much like stamps, coins and antique furniture.

During the last decade, collectibles in general have proven to be strong investments.

"Very conservatively, prices of all collectibles across the board, from classic automobiles to European paintings of the nineteenth century, rose *six* times in price during the 1970s," observes Richard H. Rush, the author of **Selling Collectibles For Capital Gain.**

Comic books, from 1973 to 1983, actually did better than many collectibles. During those ten years on the average, desirable comics increased *eight* times in value. In other words, if you invested $100 in comics in 1973, they would have been worth about $803 in 1983.

So, judging from the past performance of collectibles in general and comics in particular, it looks like you are a smart investor when you plunk down your money each week at your local comic book store or newsstand.

You better wait, however, before you close out your bank account and buy a triplicate run of **X-Men**. Investing in comic books today is not what it appears to be.

## TWO TYPES OF COLLECTIBLES

"There are two types of collectibles," according to A.J. Kock, author of **How To Get The Most Profit From Your Collectibles.**.

"There are the *investment* collectibles, such as Chinese ceramics, stamps, coins, rare books, period furniture, and paintings. Then there are the *nostalgic* collectibles, like dolls, toys, baseball cards, postcards, and comic books."

Investment collectibles are established items which have a proven historical, aesthetic or practical value. They have an international marketplace, an active auction house market and they attract the attention of banks, investment syndicates and portfolio planners.

Nostalgic collectibles, on the other hand, are like "penny stocks" and wildcat oil wells. They are low-cost and high-risk, yet they do have the potential for large profits.

The real danger in comic book investing is that many collectors think of their comics as being in the same class as the "safe" investment collectibles, such as rare coins, stamps, first edition books and antique silverware.

## HIGH RISK, BIG BUCKS

In reality, comic book collecting is still considered a very speculative venture with high investment risks.

The measure of a collectible's true investment worth is its strength in international and national marketplaces.

For example, stamp collectors have on the average two major national auctions *every day* of the year. Millions of dollars are spent each month on rare stamps by collectors world-wide.

Stamps are such solid collectible investments that when Jews had to leave Nazi Germany before World War II, they often turned their life savings and all their possessions into rare stamps that could be easily transported and sold in their new home country.

Would you be comfortable selling everything you owned, and then buying a few cases of **X-Men** comics?

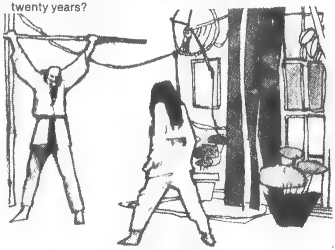
So you see, comic collecting is not in the same field as big-time investment collectibles, and you would be wise not to invest more than you can afford to lose. There is, however, good money to be made if you collect (and invest) wisely.

The classic story of comic book investments is **Action Comics 1**. In 1965 you could buy a copy of this comic for $100. Today you can sell **Action 1** for $18,000.

Back in 1965, a collector was really risking a hundred bucks when he bought **Action 1**. No one knew if comics were an emerging collectible that would soar in value or if they were a passing fad.

Now we all realize that comics have increased spectacularly in value over the last twenty years.

The big question today is: Does this mean that comics you buy now will be equally good investments over the *next* twenty years?



AT THAT MOMENT, CAP'S YOUTHFUL PARTNER, BUCKY BARNES, WHO HAD BEEN MASQUERADING AS ONE OF THE NAZIS, ALSO REACHES THE SCENE LIKE A TORRID TEEN-AGE TORNADO...!
CAP'S BACK TO NORMAL AGAIN! HE'S FIGHTING THE KRAUTS!
OH NO YOU DON'T, RATZI!
HIMMEL!
WONK!
copyright 1986 Marvel Comics

## COMICS GROW UP

Before we use the past performance of collectibles to predict the future, you need to realize that the huge growth for the Golden Age comics, such as **Action** 1, has *already* occurred. Never again will comics increase so rapidly in value as they did in the 1970s.

Every collectible, be it a beer can or an airmail stamp, has a period when it moves from a small circle of collectors to become a national hobby. This happened to comics in the 1970s, and that decade was a unique period in comic collecting history.

Comic books, like all other collectibles, have periods of fast and slow growth in value. If you buy during a slow period and sell during an upswing, your investment will make you money. These periods make up what is called the collectible's growth cycle.

Typically, every collectible, including comics, begins its growth cycle at a value that is equal or less than its original purchase price. A new comic starts out with a value of 75 cents to a dollar. In the 1940s, Golden Age comics began with the cover price value of ten cents.

For the first 15 years of their cycle, Golden Age comics stayed at a value of five to ten cents. Roughly around 1959 to 1961, the comics from the 1940s became collector's items—that is, they were being purchased for anywhere from 25 cents to a dollar, or above the original cover price.

This is the first phase of collectibility — when the value of an item rises above its original price.

## THE PHASES OF COLLECTIBILITY

In the current comic market, some new comics enter this first phase of collectibility almost immediately upon publication. Some new issues are worth two to three times cover price within a month after release. In a few cases, a really hot comic might be presold in such large quantities that it actually achieves a collectible value even before publication!

On the other hand, there are hundreds of comics from the last five to ten years that are still worth less than cover price. These comics are not yet truly "collectible," although you can bet someone is collecting them.

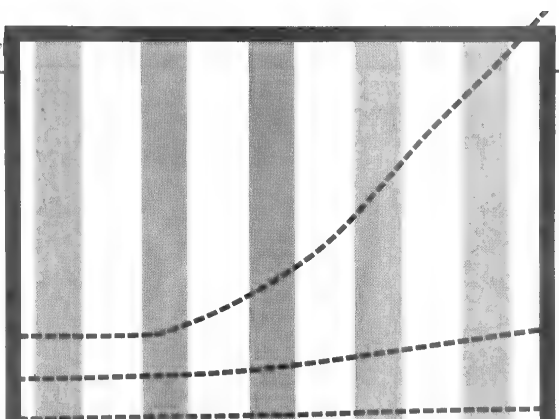
The second phase of growth occurs as a larger and larger audience of collectors and dealers take notice of a collectible.

For example, Golden Age comics entered this period roughly around 1963 to 1969. With a new "hot" comic, this period might occur within three to four months after publication.

During this second phase, prices start a slow but steady rise as collectors and dealers try to ascertain the true value of the collectible.

The third phase is the one that collectors and investors must be especially aware of. This is the period where a collectible undergoes rapid and sometimes skyrocketing increases in value.

Golden Age Comics experienced this rapid growth phase from 1970 to 1976. A new "hot" comic might hit this same phase within five to eight months after publication.




The fourth phase is the plateau period. The collectible gradually reaches a price value where price increases are modest and predictable. Long before this point, the wise investor has already purchased the collectible and enjoyed the increase in value.

During this fourth phase, price increases for a back issue comic are generally about twice the national inflation rate.

Finally, the final phase of a collectible is the downturn. At this stage, either prices begin to actually fall or they increase so slowly (below or at the national inflation rate) that the collectible's value in effect declines or stands still. Already some old comics from the 1940s through the early 1960s have entered this period. The prices for 1950s Carl Barks books, such as **Uncle Scrooge** and **Walt Disney Comics**, are in this phase of "growth."

Once collectibles reach this period in their growth cycle, they usually retain their value, but provide a slow and ineffectual return on your investment.

## WINNERS, LOSERS, AND HAS-BEENS

Not only do comic books as a general class of collectibles have a growth cycle, but individual comic books grow at their own rate as well.

For example, in 1966 there were only a few comics that sold for above $50. The three most valuable books twenty years ago were **Action Comics** 1 (first Superman), **Whiz 1** (first Captain Marvel) and **Single Series 20** (Tarzan by Hal Foster). Each of these books were worth roughly $75 to $100 in 1966.

Now twenty years later, **Action** 1 goes for $18,500, **Whiz 1** is valued at $13,000 and the Tarzan **Single Series 20** is priced at a modest $450.

All three started off at the same value in 1966, but they obviously grew at different rates.

What's even more impressive is that the most valuable comic today, **Marvel Comics** 1 which sells for $23,000 could be had for $25 to $50 back in those days.

## LEARNING FROM THE PAST...

Now let's look at why some comics grow more rapidly in value than others. First, **Whiz** 1 was at one time thought to be second only to **Action 1** in value and collectibility. Captain Marvel outsold Captain America in the Golden Age market.

Why? Because back in the early days of organized comic collecting, there were many collectors who remembered Captain Marvel and the other Fawcett heroes from childhood.

After all, the last issue of the original Captain Marvel came out in 1954. The number of collectors who remembered this Fawcett superhero slowly declined through the 1960s.

At the same time in the mid 1960s, Marvel comics started to dominate the collector's market. The early Marvel (or Timely) comics, long priced below DC and Fawcett titles, experienced one of the largest value growths in comics history. The first ten issues of Captain America, which could be had for $10 to $15 tops, tripled in price in less than a year.

## ...AND BACK TO THE FUTURE

The lesson to be learned is that the investment potential of a comic is directly related to the interest of the current generation of collectors. In fact, the real strength of any collectible market depends upon its ability to attract *future* collectors to the field.

For there to be future comic collectors, there has to be a growing number of people who *presently* read comics.

Traditionally, the entry point for new collectors is newsstand sales. Even collectors who end up at comic specialty shops and conventions begin buying their comics off the racks in their neighborhoods.

## LAST GASP?

If newsstand outlets for comic books continue to decline as they have over the last five years, the comic book market for older books will slowly die.

The back issue comic market would decline to a few hundred or thousand hard-core collectors who remember the "old days." And as these collectors leave the field, they would not be replaced by younger collectors.

Collectible comics would eventually join the ranks of other dated and dying collectibles such as the pulps, Big Little Books and the "dime novels" from the turn of the century.

Sure, there would always be a demand for such real rarities as **Action 1** or **Batman 1**, just as there will always be a demand for the "best" in any field of collectibles, large or small. But you can also be sure that no one is going to be clamoring to give you $50 for some black and white alternative comic that you bought back in 1985.

Should newsstand sales of new comics continue to decline, there will be hundreds of thousands of comic books ten years from now that will have almost no collector value. Your complete run of **X-Men** could be worth about $20.

copyright 1986 DC Comics

## OR BRIGHT FUTURE?

On the other hand, many comic book readers believe that we may be on the verge of a second wave of explosive growth in comic books.

Not since the early 1960s have there been so many comic book companies, so many new titles, new characters and exciting new talents and concepts.

If this trend continues into the early 1990s and if comic books can somehow reach a growing number of new and young collectors, then you may have a rare opportunity today to make yourself filthy rich within ten years.

Why? Because so many of the alternative and popular comics today are published in print runs of 20,000 to 100,000 which is roughly one-fifth to one-tenth of the print runs of the comics of the 1940s and 1960s.

There is a much smaller supply of these new comics, relatively speaking, and any large increase in future collector demand could cause some of these to blast off in price increases.

## INVESTMENT TIPS

I would advise investors today who are looking at the new issues to buy as follows:

**(1) Go for color comics over black and whites.** Black and whites will be too easy to counterfeit and reprint if they do increase in value over the next twenty years.

**(2) Go for artistic quality and good production values.** Ignore the trendy and fad stuff like "Mutant Radioactive Small Furry Animal Ninjas."

**(3) Seek out unusual comic related items, such as promotion posters that are printed in full color.** At the same time, avoid paying too much for limited portfolio editions and obviously created "instant" collector items that are now flooding the marketplace.

**(4) If you buy back issues, remember the maxim: Buy The Best You Can Afford.** Like every other collectible, the best condition and most desirable comics increase the fastest in value and will hold their worth even when the rest of the market goes soft.

**(5) Buy Cheap, Sell Dear.** Don't be in any hurry to buy one particular or specific issue of any title. Instead, go for the best bargain. Out of the thousands of new comics in the back issue marketplace, you can always find those that are underpriced. If you insist, however, on only buying a **G.I. Joe 2**, for example, you'll pay the price.

**(6) Buy for the future, not the present.** The comic you buy today will only make you money tomorrow. If you buy only what is currently popular or hot, you'll always be a few months behind the trends.

**(7) Know your hobby.** The more you know about comics, comic book artists, comic companies, etc., the better educated buyer you become. Just last week, a friend of mine pulled a rare 1950s giveaway out of a convention quarter box that had Bill Everett artwork (the original artist for the Sub-Mariner). It had never even been identified as Everett artwork, but he recognized the art style immediately. As a result, he got a $75 comic for 25 cents.

**(8) Watch the growth cycle of your comics carefully.** There are good times to buy just as there are good times to sell comic books for investment. With the new comics, these cycles can be very erratic. Make sure a comic is really reflecting collector demand and not speculator interest before you buy too heavily upfront.

## THE FINAL WORD

Finally, remember the warnings at the beginning of this article. Comic books are considered risky investments, even by those who specialize in the collectible field. There is absolutely no guarantee that a hundred dollar comic will be worth even a dime next year.

The future of comic book investing depends entirely upon the new readers of comics today, the new publishers, the new titles and the health and well-being of the *current* comic book marketplace.

If we can continue to attract new readers to comics, they will always remain a good investment and a great hobby.

Here's hoping. CF

**MIKE BENTON is the author of Comic Book Collecting for Fun and Profit and a leading expert on investments in rare comic books.**

# SILVER AGE

BY WILL JACOBS AND GERARD JONES

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In the earliest days, the signatures read "S. Lee & J. Kirby". It sounded like a team of equals. Later, when credits began to appear, they read "Written and Edited by Stan (The Man) Lee, Drawn by Jack (King) Kirby." That was perfectly understandable. Obviously the classic DC/Fawcett method was used: Lee wrote a complete comic book script, then submitted it to Kirby, who illustrated it.

And that was how all of us Marvelites in the early 1960s assumed the comics of our favorite young upstart company were made. When we wrote letters of grandiose, overstated praise to **Fantastic Four** or **X-Men** or **Thor** we always raved about Kirby's powerful art, his pulse-pounding fight scenes and awesome machinery. But when it came time to praise the plots ("Where do you get your wacky ideas?", "You put real tragedy into comic mags", "I've never felt such suspense before") it was always Smilin' Stan Lee at whom we tossed our palm leaves. He was, after all, the Writer and Editor. In isolation, at his typewriter, he cooked up all those characters and spun those galaxy-spanning yarns himself. So we thought.

## WHO WROTE THE WORDS?

But in an interview in 1968, Lee made an interesting revelation. "Some artists need more of a plot than others," he said. "Jack Kirby, for instance, can sometimes plot and draw a whole story from a conversation over the phone. I might just say, 'Next month's villain will be Doctor Doom,' and he'll send in a completely drawn story." What? We wondered. Would that be exceptional, or was it always the way? Was Kirby plotting every issue of those comics we loved? And if so, was he creating the supporting characters? And even the villains? Then what was Stan Lee doing? Just writing words into the stories...if even that? And who really created those great heroes and series?

Over the next few years, Lee dropped other hints as to Kirby's huge role. Rumors began to spread that Kirby was really doing all of it, that Lee was just using his editorial powers to put his name on the stories (but they spread only in the back alleys of comic fandom, of course. Most fans knew only what the credits said, and kept raving about

## THE EARLY MARVELS— WHO WROTE THE WORDS?

Stan's great plots). When Kirby left Marvel to join DC in 1970, we half-expected the "Fourth World" series to read just like **Thor** or **Captain America**.

But it didn't. It read...strangely. This was like no comic book scripting we had ever seen. The characters were nothing like Marvel characters in the way they thought or talked. And Stan Lee stories kept reading pretty much like Stan Lee stories, at least in terms of the words. But there were themes in **New Gods, Forever People** and **Mister Miracle** that echoed the great cosmic/mythological undercurrents of Marvel at its peak, themes that surfaced with Galactus, the Silver Surfer, the Inhumans and Asgard. At a Marvel without Kirby, those themes diminished in stature, ceased to be myths and became just...plots. Obviously, Kirby had brought something powerful to Marvel, something far beyond drawing, beyond even working up plots about somebody else's characters. But what, exactly, had he done?

The most thorough exposition of the Lee-Kirby relationship appeared in 1974, in Lee's book **Origins of Marvel Comics**. There Stan stated pretty clearly that he made up all the important characters and series (including the whole concept of the Fantastic Four), even describing the personal experiences and musings that led to their conceptions, then supplied Kirby with an outline of a story and left him to pace it, break it down and draw it as he saw fit. Lee would then add the captions and dialogue to the pencil art. (This system has now been institutionalized as the "Marvel style").

Sometimes, Lee said, he and Kirby worked out new series and characters together in meetings. And occasionally Kirby would throw in ideas of his own in the course of drawing the story. In the book's sequel, **Son of Origins** (1975), Lee says that he and Kirby developed the cosmic villain Galactus together over lunch, and that when Kirby brought in the art for the first Galactus story, Lee was surprised to find a new character, the Silver Surfer, in it. Lee suggests, however, that Kirby conceived the Surfer as "just a high-flying, colorful supporting character," and that it was he who made him a noble, tragic, quasi-mythic figure.

Kirby promptly and loudly disputed this version of the genesis of the Marvel Universe. Within a few years he had been quoted saying that he had created all the Lee-Kirby Marvel series entirely by himself: He had worked up the Fantastic Four and submitted it whole to Lee on his own initiative to help rejuvenate the Marvel line; the Hulk had sprung solely from his interest in the classics, specifically **Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde**; Thor came from his studies of mythology; he conceived the X-Men from a long interest in the fates of the world's hounded and persecuted; and all the villains and supporting characters, all the plots and settings of all those Kirby-drawn comics, were his own creation. In conversations with the authors of this article in 1984, he even asserted that he wrote every one of those comics, that Stan Lee did nothing but act as editor.

**THE POWER OF TRANSFORMATION— FROM BANNER TO THE INCREDIBLE HULK, KIRBY STYLE!**

COPYRIGHT 1968 Marvel Comics

(Now, apparently fearing that Kirby will claim legal ownership of the characters, Marvel is pressuring him to sign a statement denying any role in their creation, refusing to return Kirby's own original art to him if he refuses.)

Obviously, one man or the other or both is exaggerating his role. In our book **The Comic Book Heroes** (Crown, 1985), we skirted the issue, always referring to Lee and Kirby as "co-creators" of all their series. But our research has given us some important clues to the riddle of Lee and Kirby, and we will here hazard some guesses and present some evidence as to the true origins of the Marvel line.

## THE TRUE ORIGINS

First of all, there seems little doubt that Stan Lee did in fact write the words to the comics. There are indeed some shades of difference in the writing styles of, for example, **Fantastic Four**, **Spider-Man** and **Iron Man**, but no more than the different characters, themes and milieus might bring about. There is an essential unity to all the captions and dialogue in super-hero comics credited as being "Written by Stan Lee," no matter who drew them.

When Kirby says he wrote the original comics, it is likely that he means he invented the story, plotted it and told it visually, with marginal written cues to Lee as to the nature of the events and emotional tone of each scene. This is, arguably, the major part of writing; and to Kirby, who rarely had to deal with scripting until the 1970s, it might seem to be the only work that could legitimately be called "writing."

RRIED
IT
A
...!
SURE! AND SHE COULD ALSO BE HAVIN' A DATE WITH SOME NO GOOD, CRUMMY, LOW-LIFE WHO'S TRYIN' TO BEAT MY TIME!
BEN, DEAR, WHY MUST YOU ALWAYS SUSPECT THE WORST?
BZZZZZ
ZZZZZ
FIGGER IT OUT, SUSIE! WITH A PAN LIKE MINE, WHAT ELSE WOULDJA EXPECT??!
©copyright 1986 Marvel Comics

Yet Lee was able, through his words, to dictate much of the tone, theme and emotional content of a story even if it had been completely plotted by Kirby. We discovered an interesting example of this in a page of original art from **Fantastic Four** Number 31 at a recent convention. The page shows Sue Storm confronting the Mole Man, who holds her hostage. Pencilled notes in the margin (identified as Kirby's handwriting by Greg Thibodeux, Kirby's sometime collaborator) have the Mole Man saying, "Tell your pals to surrender or I kill you," and Sue responding, "There's no need to do this." But Lee's flowery script completely transforms the scene. Sue cries, "No!! You're mad!! No matter how powerful you are...no matter how many subterranean subjects you have, you can't defeat all of mankind!!" The Mole Man replies, 'Silence, female! How little you know! I have weapons which the surface fools above cannot even comprehend!!...By holding you hostage, the soft-hearted Fantastic Four will not dare to attack me!! And, as you know, they are the ones I fear most!!" "Again you misunderstand us!" Sue responds. "They won't sacrifice a cause, just to save me!" Thus Kirby's confident, tough-talking Mole Man becomes an obsessed, desperate and frightened despot, while the level-headed Sue becomes an idealistic, self-sacrificing pontificator; and the simple theme of conflict and capture becomes a tragedy of errors, a fateful misunderstanding between subterranean and surface people.

A further example comes from one conversation with Kirby in which he said he conceived Reed Richards as "just a regular guy, like you and me." Anyone familiar with the super-intellectual, condescending, isolated, driven, emotionally flawed leader of the Fantastic Four will realize that Lee, in his scripting, was able to make the character something very different from what the artist/plotter conceived when he drew his pictures.

Thus it seems safe to assume that the emotional nuances, the personal oddities and neuroses and the difficult relationships for which the Marvel heroes became famous were mainly Lee's contribution. Indeed, Lee's principal concern as a writer, whether working with Jack Kirby, Steve Ditko, Don Heck, or any other Marvel artist, would always be his fascination with the little victories and failings of troubled people: The lonely, maimed, outcast, misunderstood. It is worth noting that the greatest emotional turmoil, the greatest attention to character development and relationship, was always in the non-Kirby comics that Lee wrote. In Lee-Kirby stories, the emotional content often has the feeling of being squeezed in or slapped on after the fact, through words that have little to do with the pictures.

It seems probable from our research that this was Lee's major gift to Marvel. By comparing Kirby's last two projects before joining Marvel — **Challengers of the Unknown** for DC and "Sky Masters" for newspaper syndication — with his early Marvel super-hero work, we must conclude that Kirby had little interest or aptitude for the Marvel type of emotionality...but that the heroes, teams, villains and plots of the Lee-Kirby comics were almost entirely his invention.

COSMIC POWER, ALA JACK KIRBY

## STRUCTURE OF THEME

The structural similarities between the Challengers and the FF are myriad. Whereas pre-FF Marvel comics almost invariably consisted of three or four short stories, and nearly all DC super-hero comics contained two or three, the Challengers' adventures generally ran the full length of the issue, divided into four chapters, each with its own title. The early FFs and Hulks follow precisely the same form, suggesting that Kirby really was plotting them entirely on his own; even an outline by Lee is unlikely, since he would probably have outlined shorter stories. The Challengers' origin concerns four adventurers who survive a plane crash, discover that it's given them a new purpose to exist, and band together as a team of heroes. The Fantastic Four were four adventurers who survived a rocket crash, discover that the cosmic rays they encountered have given them strange powers, and band together as a team of heroes.

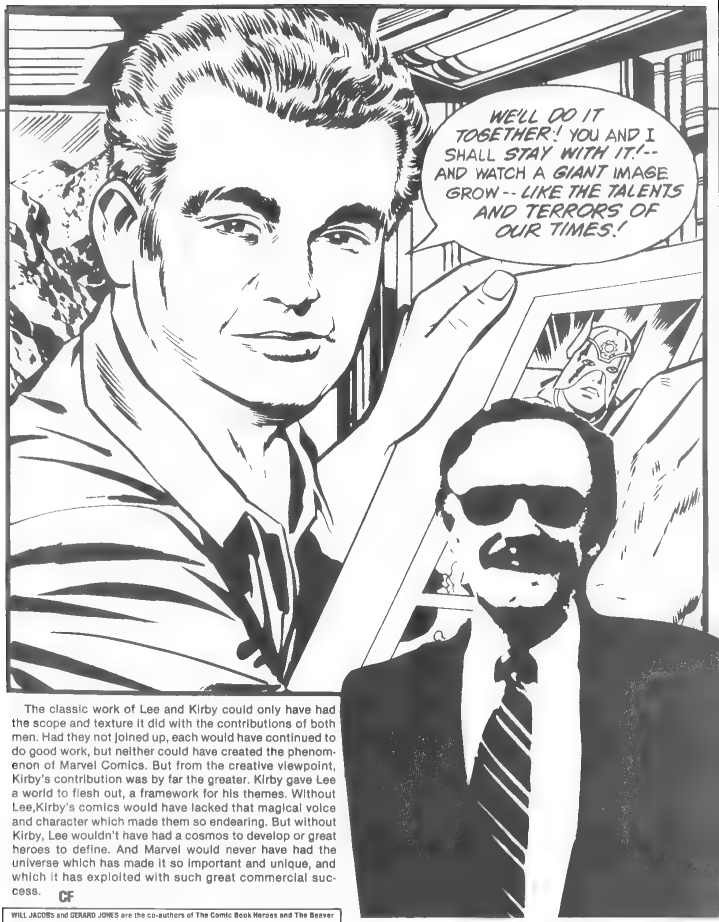
Both teams were anchored by a gruff strong man (Rocky/The Thing) and a rugged intellectual (Prof/Mr. Fantastic).

Kirby's pre-Marvel work foreshadows themes and approaches that would extend far beyond the Fantastic Four. Many basic plots and situations from **Challengers** and "Sky Masters" recur in all of Kirby's Marvel super-hero work. One Thor villain, The Tomorrow Man, for example, was only a slightly-altered recasting of one of the Challengers' foes from 1959.

Most important of all, Kirby's Marvel work reflected the same far-ranging scope, the same epic quality, as his preceding creations. The Fantastic Four, in their earliest days, struggled with subterranean monsters, armadas from outer space, invasions from the sea, interplanetary kidnappers, powerful mind-controllers, conquerors from the future, trips back in time...just as did the Challengers. Kirby's universe, whether in Challengers, Fantastic Four, Sky Masters, or Thor, was one of enormous distances, innumerable worlds, and godlike powers. Stan Lee, when not working with Kirby, scarcely ever showed an interest in such enormities.

## DYNAMIC DUO

A look at Kirby's work after leaving Marvel in 1970 shows the recurrence of many of his favorite subjects and icons. The New Gods, a race apart from man with a cosmic history, spawned by creatures not of this world, were a return to the Inhumans of the Marvel years. The Silver Surfer resurfaced as the Black Racer. Galactus evolved into Darkseid. Contrasting these "Fourth World" creations with their Marvel antecedents, however, reveals the nature of the Lee-Kirby collaboration: The Kirby-solo characters are grandiose, far bigger than life, either archetypes of celestial magnitude or mere pawns in a cosmic chess game; the earlier versions, although the same at their roots, were fleshed out with fears and longings and personal peculiarities that made them characters more than symbols. In short, Lee's contribution was the stuff of everyday life, where Kirby's was the stuff of legends.




The classic work of Lee and Kirby could only have had the scope and texture it did with the contributions of both men. Had they not joined up, each would have continued to do good work, but neither could have created the phenomenon of Marvel Comics. But from the creative viewpoint, Kirby's contribution was by far the greater. Kirby gave Lee a world to flesh out, a framework for his themes. Without Lee,Kirby's comics would have lacked that magical voice and character which made them so endearing. But without Kirby, Lee wouldn't have had a cosmos to develop or great heroes to define. And Marvel would never have had the universe which has made it so important and unique, and which it has exploited with such great commercial success. CF

WILL JACOBS and GERARD JONES are the co-authors of The Comic Book Heroes and The Beaver Papers.

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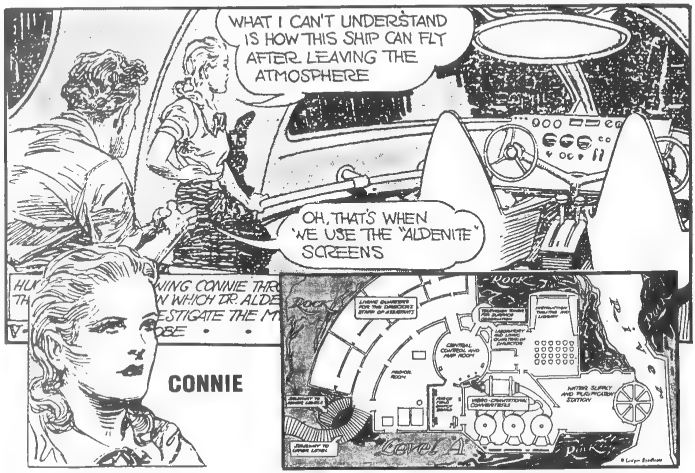
# STRIP SEARCH

BY RON GOULART

An impressive, but nearly forgotten, science fiction achievement of the 1930s and early 1940s was Frank Godwin's **Connie**. Begun as a Sunday page in 1927, it initially purveyed flapper and lounge lizard gags in typical pretty girl page fashion. When Godwin added a daily strip in 1929, though, strange and drastic changes began to occur. The continuities involved the slim blond Connie with airplanes, kidnappers, South of the border revolutions, African safaris and lustful shieks. Connie was not a dumb blonde, but her somewhat aggressive innocence enabled her to walk repeatedly into trouble. Although her early adventures were pretty much parodies of prevailing movie and slick magazine melodramas, as the Thirties got underway Godwin switched to more serious, and more fantastic stuff. By the middle of the decade, both daily and Sunday, **Connie** was involved in fantasy and science fiction.

As a freelance adventuress, and sometime private investigator, Connie trekked in search of lost cities, tangled with invisible men and crazed scientists bent on world conquest. "Great heavens!" exclaims a character in a typical adventure. "Do you know what these things are? They're ATOMIC BOMBS! He's preparing to make himself DICTATOR OF THE WORLD!" She also rocketed to the far planets and traveled to the remote future — "Having arrived in the 30th Century in search of Connie, Jack and Dr. Chrono have been appointed Connie's assistants in defending the United Nations," explained a 1936 caption, "against the Yellow Invaders who have, in some mysterious manner, caused all the electric power in the city to go dead."

Godwin, who had been working professionally since the first decade of the century, was a master draftsman and a genius with a pen. His **Connie** Sunday pages, mixing art nouveau trappings and decor with 1930s pulp plots, are unlike anything done before or since. As Connie moves through the lavish sets, fantastic costumes and rococo dialogue, you get the feeling you're watching a sort of R-rated Oz movie. The feature continued on into the middle 1940s, running in a slim list of newspapers. It did reach a relatively large audience through reprints in the pages of **Famous Funnies**.


WHAT I CAN'T UNDERSTAND IS HOW THIS SHIP CAN FLY AFTER LEAVING THE ATMOSPHERE
OH, THAT'S WHEN WE USE THE "ALDENITE" SCREENS
CONNIE

# SCI FI FUNNIES
# PART III

## DON DIXON

The Brooklyn **Eagle**—which was a newspaper and not a superhero — ventured into the SF line in the middle Thirties, when it introduced **Don Dixon** and offered it for syndication. A Sunday page, it was written by Bob Moore and drawn by Carl Pfeufer. While it soon became an imitation of **Flash Gordon**, Pfeufer had made little attempt initially to imitate Alex Raymond's drybrush style and for the first few months Don was an adolescent boy. He then grew up, got himself a mentor in the person of Dr. Lugoff (not to be confused with Flash's crony Dr. Zarkov) and commenced having a series of mildly erotic sword and sorcery adventures. The decor was early Mongo, with lots of marble columns and stone towers. The men dressed like light opera heroes, the ladies like burlesque queens. All the stories took place in the Hidden Empire. Don's steady female companion was named Princess Wanda.

THERE GO TONS OF SUPPLIES FOR THE GREAT ADVENTURE. THE PEOPLE ARE TAKING IT WONDERFULLY.
ANN, I HAVE A QUEER FEELING THAT THIS IS GOING TO WORK OUT ALL RIGHT!
MARVIN BRADLEY
60

## SPEED SPAULDING

Early in 1940, yet another runaway planet started heading right for Earth and a smashup seemed inevitable. "The Earth will be shattered into fragments by the collision...NO LIVING THING WILL SURVIVE." The John F. Dille syndicate, who'd given us **Buck Rogers** ten years earlier, had decided to turn the novel **When Worlds Collide** into a daily and Sunday comic feature. The book must've seemed a natural. Orson Welles had scared the more nervous segment of the population only the year before with his **Mercury Theatre** broadcast of **The War of the Worlds** and getting blown to atoms by a strayed planet was potentially even more thrilling than a Martian invasion of New Jersey. It's almost always been true that a populace worried about approaching large scale disasters will rush to be entertained by an even larger makebelieve disaster. Yet somehow, even with the United States on the brink of World War II, the strip failed to catch on.

Rather than name it after the book, the syndicate christened the strip **Speed Spaulding.** Speed, who doesn't appear in the novel or its sequel, is the handsome blond hero of this saga of the waning days of the planet Earth. Professor Bronson, the first man to become aware of the two spheres hurtling toward our planet — he modestly dubs them Bronson Alpha and Bronson Beta—was transferred from the novel to the comic strip, not without having his name altered to Bronton. The writing on **Speed Spaulding** was credited to Edwin Balmer and Philip Wylie, authors of the book, but that seems unlikely. The drawing, done in a creditable variation of the Milton Caniff style, was by a youthful Marvin Bradley. Not too lucky with Speed, Bradley fared much better when he later teamed up to work on **Rex Morgan, MD.**

No comic strip, though, ever came to a more impressive conclusion than **Speed Spaulding.** Speed and his select group of friends hop aboard their spaceship just hours before Alpha is due to strike. They blast off, using their atomic engines, and head into space. In the final panel of the final strip the world blows up.

## JOHN CARTER

The 1940s was a decade that saw such wild science fiction ideas as rockets and atomic bombs become part of everyday reality. In the years that brought the United States out of the last of the Depression, into a world war and finally into a briefly optimistic postwar era, there were not a great many new SF strips born. A few interesting newcomers, however, did emerge, including one by no less than Edgar Rice Burroughs, and old standbys such as **Flash Gordon** changed and branched out, as we noted in our last installment. And now that sci fi props had spilled over into the real world, they also began to show up in strips not primarily of a fantasy or science fiction nature.

John Carter of Mars, despite Edgar Rice Burroughs' fondness for him, always ran a poor second to Tarzan. He beat the apeman by several months, debuting in the pulpwood pages of **All-Story** in February of 1912, but didn't make it into the comic sections until a dozen years after Tarzan. Even then his Sunday page was far from a hit, closing down in a little over a year and a half. Burroughs had been trying, in vain, to interest syndicates in a Mars strip for nearly a decade. In 1933 he got J. Allen St. John, illustrator of many a Tarzan and John Carter novel, to draw up a batch of samples. These strips went first to King features, whereat William Randolph Hearst himself rejected them. No other syndicate showed any interest either. Finally in 1941 the persistent ERB at last persuaded United Features, distributors of his successful **Tarzan** strip, to give a John Carter Sunday page a try.

This version, written and drawn by his son, John Coleman Burroughs, arrived just as America was entering World War II. Actually Burroughs and son had already collaborated on a comics adaptation of the Mars novels. This one, also entitled **John Carter of Mars**, ran as a monthly feature in **The Funnies** comic book during 1939 and 1940. The younger Burroughs' work had improved some since then and the funny paper John Carter was more handsome and a bit more Tarzanlike in the Sunday. Even though the page didn't succeed, it was an admirable and uncompromising effort. ERB's whole extravagantly wacky version of life on the red planet was transferred to the strip, with no attempt to simplify things for newspaper readers who might not have the benefit of a science fiction background. This was the pure stuff, with the lovely heroine named Dejah Thoris and not Dale Arden, with six-armed green warriors, woolas, calots and even "the giant chicken men of Mars."

## WASH TUBBS

Throughout the Forties, SF themes were also popping up in non-fantastic strips, especially so in the years after the close of World War II. A fairly frequent user was Leslie Turner, who'd taken over the **Wash Tubbs** daily strip in 1943. Actually he'd been ghosting it for creator Roy Crane since

HE'S JUST GOTTA TAKE ME, BABY.
LOOK, ROSS, IF THAT CUCKOO HAS MONEY, MAYBE WE COULD UNLOAD THIS LEAKY OLD GASBAG ON HIM.
HMM! AN IDEA.
8-24
Roy CRANE

the late 1930s. In his postwar continuities about the undersized Wash and his twofisted buddy, Captain Easy, Turner used stories about weird contraptions capable of locating rare myranium ore, about various crackbrained scientists who could create gigantic apes, cause violent storms, teleport anything up to and including a fully-staffed ocean liner. An excellent artist and writer, Turner turned out some of the best comedy adventure sequences of the decade.

## THE OTHERS

Science fiction of a somewhat more serious nature was also appearing in other adventure strips of the period. For instance, two new late 1940s strips from the New York Herald Tribune Syndicate, heretofor noted for comics about bunny rabbits and domestic comedy, made occasional use of chemical-biological weapons, bootleg atomic research, marvelous inventions and the like. One of them was **The Saint**, based on the wellknown Leslie Charteris character and apparently actually scripted by him. It was drawn by veteran comic book artist Mike Roy and inked for a spell by Jack Davis. **Bodyguard** was the other newcomer that dabbled in SF now and then. Created by Lawrence Larlar, it was drawn by John Spranger. Spranger had worked in comic books, too, ghosting many an episode of Jack Cole's **Plastic Man** and then working as an assistant to Will Eisner on **The Spirit**. His strip was done in an effective blend of both styles with some nice touches of his own.

Next time we'll wrap up our survey by contemplating SF strips of the 1950s and after. Included'll be glimpses of the funnies career of Tom Corbett, Space Cadet and a space opera that ran in exactly one newspaper. **CF**

**RON GOULART is co-creator of the Star Hawks comic strip along with Gil Kane. He has over 140 books to his name along with various articles in major publications in too many fields to mention. He has wron awards for mystery, science fiction and western stories and is considered to be one of the world's leading experts in popular culture.**

COMICS 50th ISSUE

# COMICS 1986

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Comics are exciting again. The industry is alive with a feeling of freshness, of renewal. What makes this even more interesting is that people are excited about different things; not everyone is even in agreement as to what constitute the current high watermarks.

For many years comics have been plagued by inbreeding. Most of the new people coming into the field know lots about comics — but little about anything else. Comic book fans can become comic book pros. They constantly rework familiar ideas illustrated in familiar ways. But the Eighties has witnessed the emergence of a new group of writers and artists entering comics with different backgrounds — and the results have just begun to emerge. Frank Miller, who reads loads of real detective fiction, writes stories he likes and revolutionizes Daredevil, creates the **Ronin** mini-series (which is just now starting to garner appreciation largely absent 4 years ago) and charts new directions for **The Dark Knight**. Alan Moore, a British writer who grew up without the benefit of reading Marvel Comics and Superman, revitalizes the **Swamp Thing** to the extent that fans actually buy the comic *because* of the writing. With **The Watchmen** at DC, Moore infuses superheroes with uncomfortably familiar and down-to-earth character traits, making them too human for our peace of mind.

But Miller and Moore are only the tip of the iceberg that is causing comics to be viewed differently, creating dynamic yet personal visions which draw widespread attention to the 4-color comic book world. Marvel has a whole New Universe, portraying a familiar reality peopled with characters different from the Marvel Comics norm. The simple fact that Spider-Man will never guest-star in a single one of the titles makes them unique.

The winds of change are howling through the industry but everyone has their own ideas about which way those currents are blowing and whether they bode good or ill. For some this is an exciting time of experimentation and a signal of even more important trends in the future. They feel that there is now a chance for new ideas to remain afloat until they find their own level in the marketplace. Others hope that they will be able to do more work they enjoy as opposed to only doing what appears to make good commercial sense at the moment.

When discussing the current state of comics with the people who, in one way or another, contribute to the complicated mosaic of today's four color world, one finds points of agreement almost as striking as points of disagreement. One creator finds a trend restrictive, while another finds the same factor liberating. Some see no trend at all and just think that a couple unique visions have happened to surface at the same time. We are forced to question whether what we think we see is what is happening at all. The divergent styles of writing and illustrating are matched by viewpoints which show an even more complicated picture of the state of comics today than most readers are seeing. For **Comics Feature**'s 50th anniversary issue, we hope to present the vision of the industry and its possibilities seen by the most dynamic creative talents in the field. These are the people who have and will shape the directons of comics in the years to come.

COMICS FEATURE 50th issue

# JIM SHOOTER

## —EDITOR-IN-CHIEF—

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The prime mover behind Marvel's New Universe titles, Jim Shooter has a definite point of view on how they differ from all the Marvels that have gone before, as well as from superhero comics in general.

"In a way, you have to be a better writer to write a New Universe title," Shooter states, and since he writes **Star Brand** every month, he has an extra insight on this. "You don't have some of the convenient givens to fall back on. I think that being exposed to the New Universe reveals to some of the writers where they might have been falling into traps and may make them better at avoiding those traps in the future.

"Given a universe like that of **Lord Of The Rings** — it's full of magic — there is an enormous temptation to pull a mystical knife out of a hat any time you need one. The Marvel Universe is a fantasy universe and a writer can use convenient situations without even being aware of it. Steve Englehart is writing **Justice** and said that after scripting his first issue he had revelations about **The West Coast Avengers**. I think that's bound to happen.

"I think that soon, doing comics set in the real world is going to be all the rage. The time for this sort of thing has come."

Although other current titles tackle the theme of reality in comics, Shooter doesn't feel that they are similar to what is being done in Marvel's New Universe line.

"**The Watchmen** is a total fantasy world," he observes. "While I think it's excellent, I think that it's clearly a fantasy world. We're still talking **Lord of the Rings** with **The Watchmen**. It's far from any world I'm familiar with."

For different reasons, he views **Dark Knight** in a similar light.

"I think that Frank (Miller) has gone even farther in the fantasy direction. The characters in **Dark Knight** are reduced almost to symbols. They're really archetypes. When the newscaster comes on, she really is an airhead. He has almost gone to complete graphic glyphs with these characters and is getting across a superb emotional message. He is handling those things very well but I would be astonished to hear that even Frank thinks they are fully developed, three-dimensional characters.I think it's excellent and proves the breadth and feel of the kinds of things that you can do, but that's not what I'm trying to do here."

On the other hand, while **Dark Knight** has chosen to deal with certain issues in its own way, that is not what Shooter is looking to tackle in the New Universe books.

"We're not in the business of confronting the issues — we're in the business of entertaining," he states. "But certainly within the context of the story there is no issue that we will not deal with. But if anybody thinks that we're doing the old Denny O'Neil **Green Lantern-Green Arrow**, while that stuff was fine, I'm interested in doing stories and entertainment. I'm not going to do any preaching and say 'You're gonna' get in there and talk about Apartheid!' If it comes up in the course of a story that someone is in South Africa, then sure. But are we going to do an Apartheid propaganda book? Hell no!"

As editor of Marvel Comics, Jim Shooter has a unique vantage point when looking at comics, including discovering new talent and predicting the next rising stars.

"There's a fellow named Wilce Portacio — he's turning out to be quite a good illustrator in general and not just an inker. Paul Ryan, who's doing **DP7**,I think is going to get some real notice soon as well."

What will also be getting notice are some of the other directions Marvel is planning to explore.

"We're probably going to publish something similar to the **Dark Knight** format. Because we're planning to do a project with some European artists, we're going to need to work in 44 page units in a format like the **Dark Knight** format because of their needs. We're going to be very flexible as far as formats go," Shooter adds. "We're on a roll. Everything we're doing is working and we're doing so well that now is the time to experiment. If we don't do it now, when are we going to do it? We're ready for anything!"

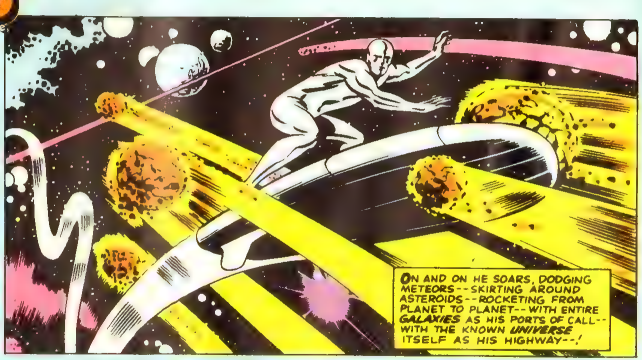
Marvel Comics is even experimenting with a new line of romance comics, packaged by Marvel and released in paperback by Harlequin.

# COMICS FEATURE™

50th Issue

Anniversary Issue

COMICS 50th ISSUE


ON AND ON HE SOARS, DODGING METEORS--SKIRTING AROUND ASTEROIDS--ROCKETING FROM PLANET TO PLANET--WITH ENTIRE GALAXIES AS HIS PORTS OF CALL--WITH THE KNOWN UNIVERSE ITSELF AS HIS HIGHWAY--!

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# JACK KIRBY
## —CREATOR—

*"Comics is the second American Revolution...We're a country of ideas. A country of innovators."*

Working in the industry for nearly 50 years, Jack Kirby is the history of comic books personified. His creations and collaborations read like a Who's Who of the four color world—Captain America, Fighting American, Green Arrow, Challengers of the Unknown, Fantastic Four, Thor, X-Men, The New Gods, Kamandi and Captain Victory form an unending creative chain beginning in 1940 and leading right up to the present. He laid the foundations so well that most of his creations continued in other hands after he moved on to new projects. Outside of superheroes, he also did the definitive work in romance, western, crime, horror and war comics. Although primarily active as a creative consultant in the animation industry today, comics is still a realm that Kirby loves well. He sees bold experimentation chiefly coming from outside of the Big Two.

"I don't see a lot of new comics but from what I have seen, the independents are doing fine. When I compare them to the mainstream companies, I don't see any difference—they're all doing well. The independents are actually doing better. They're trying new things and some of them are overtaking the so-called mainstream magazines. They're putting a lot more atmosphere into it—a lot more philosophy, if you want to call it that. It's kind of like getting individual opinions from a crowd. Sometimes you'll be standing in a park and somebody will be speaking and the crowd will be muttering and everybody will have a different opinion, and of course they're all entitled to their opinions, but they're seeing new avenues. The older companies have their own morass and can't seem to find their way out of it.

"Comics are very different from what people think they are. Some think of them in terms of the old, staid comic magazines and they're actually very different because the new ones have broken through. The independents are going to pull way ahead because they represent all the new young people that are coming out of these times.

"Whatever we think of as real or personal, it all comes out in our stories. Comics is the second American Revolution and the young person realizes that. We're a country of ideas. A country of innovators. A very young person can have an idea as valuable as an old person—maybe more so. Comics is a catchall of ideas and they're coming through in the independents. The old magazines are getting worn down—they have to make new universes, and they'll have universes replacing universes. Sometimes I wonder if they rest on the seventh day. But it's the newer and younger people whose work I look at.

"I've never followed anybody, though," Kirby adds. "I just run with the pack. I've found that whatever you want to do is the right thing. I've never followed any one style. I've always done what I wanted. I can only say that I speak for myself. Any other artist will tell you the same thing."

COMICS FEATURE 50th issue

## JAN STRNAD
## —WRITER—

Writer Jan Strnad has worked for several comic book companies, including Marvel and DC. For the latter he scripted the controversial **Sword of the Atom** mini-series, which was illustrated by Gil Kane. Under Strnad's direction, the previously seemingly placid relationship between Ray Palmer and his wife, the ex-Jean Loring, turned angry and bitter. Some old-time Atom fans cried foul.

"They were simply interpreting the relationship differently than I was," Strnad states. "They were focusing on different parts of it, looking at the panels where the two were lovey-dovey and ignoring the fact that Ray Palmer was constantly leaving Jean alone in restaurants. When I re-read all those old books in preparation, I looked at Ray and Jean and I thought, these people have a sick relationship. Here is this guy who learns how to shrink himself but he can't communicate this to her—he felt incapable of sharing. I could tell by reading between the lines that this marriage was doomed. I really didn't see what I wrote as a departure so much as a logical extension of what had been done in the early '60s."

More recently Strnad created **Dalgoda** for Fantagraphics. Although cancelled after only seven issues, the character continues in the anthology series, **Flesh and Bones**.

"As the creator of Dalgoda, I wanted to do something that was warm and human, positive and uplifting. Unfortunately, what I see happening in comics is that they're becoming darker and more negative—more cynical. There's a trend toward violence as the solution to problems; the bigger the problem the more violence you apply to it. It is significant that the hits of our time are **Watchmen** and **Dark Knight**, which are very dystopian views of society. I am a bit concerned that this is the way that comic books are going to go because of these two series."

Strnad agrees that such books are reactions against the harmless, superficial comics which have populated the industry for decades.

"The comic book world thrives on change. **Dark Knight** and **Watchmen** being a negative reaction against what's gone before might be part of that. But I think it has to be tied into the whole **Commando** and **Rambo** mentality—the whole

'Nuke Khadafy' attitude that permeates society. It's really unhealthy and actually very stupid.

"But while these are reactionary, they're also some of the more fascinating material that's being done today. Certainly Alan Moore is a major comic book writer—at least he's number one in my book. What I'm wondering is, besides the fact that he's a very good writer, is his success due to his very dark view of the world? Would he be as popular if he were doing sunshiney Pollyanna-type stories? I haven't seen a lot to counterbalance the negativity that we see in **Dark Knight** up through issue three—I don't think you could say that Frank Miller is portraying Batman as a human being, more like some kind of mythological force, almost like a demon.

"In direct contrast to **Dark Knight** and **The Watchmen**," Strnad observes, "we have books like '**mazing Man**, which are light-hearted and a lot of fun—and now '**mazing Man** is cancelled because not enough people bought them. I talked to Dick Giordano about this and asked him whether he thought comics were getting darker or more negative and he's not so sure. He thinks these might simply be two flukes and not necessarily indicative of the rest of what's happening in the DC line.

"It's really hard to separate whether the books are real successful because of the creators involved or because they're hitting a responsive chord in the audience. I think it's the latter because not everything that Frank Miller does is so well received as **Dark Knight**. He has yet to do any lighthearted spoof or anything where you'd say that hijinks ensue, so we don't know if he would sell in that view or not—but I have this sneaky suspicion that he wouldn't. I haven't seen a lot to counterbalance the negativity that we see in **Dark Knight** or **The Watchmen**. Maybe later something will happen that's definitely sweetness and light, but I'd be surprised if it did."

Despite his observations, Strnad still admires the work that Moore, in particular, is doing.

"What I most want to see is good work and certainly Alan Moore, however dark his view, is an excellent writer. Dave Gibbons is doing a great job on the art. As long as these two want to work together, that's what I want to see, whether it's dark or light. I'd like to see more positive things because it would reflect a positive attitude within society. I don't think that the dark comic books are going to warp people's minds and turn them into axe-murderers. It's more likely that what they're saying is that we have a very pessimistic society right now and we're tending toward simplistic solutions—violent simplistic solutions—which is a dangerous attitude sitting as we are five minutes to midnight on the nuclear clock. If we saw more positive comic books succeeding, that would be a good sign for society. But you can't ignore the fact that movies are coming out the same way—going for simplistic, violent solutions to very dangerous problems. I don't think there's really any getting around that. You can't really write comic books for an audience that doesn't exist—as I'm finding out with **Dalgoda**. You have to write for the audience that is there."

COMICS 50th ISSUE

What does the man who launched the Marvel Age of Comics 25 years ago think of what's happening in comic books now? Well, since Stan is active in the animation industry at Marvel Productions, as well as writing the daily Spider-Man newspaper strip, he isn't as in touch with the vast numbers of titles coming out these days.

"I've got to preface anything I say with the fact that I'm probably the least qualified guy to give an opinion because I've really been so much out of comics. I wish that I read them faithfully and could speak knowledgably, but when the books arrive here in the office, I'm lucky if I have time to just flip through the covers to see what they are. So I'm not really on top of things."

But Stan has made a point to seek out the books which have been getting more than an average amount of attention over the past few months. **Watchmen**, **Dark Knight** and **Man of Steel** for examples.

"I admire the fact that everybody is trying to do quality work, trying to get adult stories and the artwork is lovely. The general feeling I get is that everybody is aiming for an older audience and is trying to stop comics from being on the bottom rung of the cultural totem pole and elevating them to really where they belong, and I think that's great. I think that the people at Marvel, at DC, and even at the independent companies who are trying to do this should be commended."

And, of course, this is what Stan himself was trying to do when he revolutionized an industry by ushering in the new direction with Marvel Comics 25 years ago.

"I always dreamed of the day when comics would not be considered just unimportant kid stuff. In fact, the example I've always given to everybody whenever I make a speech or anything is to say that there isn't a thing intrinsically wrong with comics as a medium of communication or entertainment—they're just pictures and words. Movies and television are just pictures and words, except that the pictures are moving and you can hear the words. Novels are just words without the pictures. Paintings are pictures without the words. There's nothing wrong with comics. Comics are a great way to communicate. The best example in the world is if Shakespeare and Michelangelo were still alive today and the two of them decided to collaborate and do a comic. I'm sure that nobody would say: 'I don't want to bother reading that. That's just kid stuff.' It would be a treasure."

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"Comics are only as good, or as bad, as the people who do them, and if they're done magnificently by wonderful writers and artists, then they're a very significant part of American or worldwide culture. The problem is that in the past, and I mean 30 or 40 years ago, they were really just considered as time-wasting material for very young kids or stupid adults and nobody paid much attention to them. But now that people are trying to write really intelligent stories and the illustrations are attaining a new level of sophistication, comics are beginning to come into their own."

When asked whether the uniquely American concept of the costumed hero has largely been responsible for the juvenile image of comic books, Stan pauses for a moment and then states, "As a matter of fact I do think that the colorful costume is a problem because it's like shorthand for: This is for kids and yes, I do agree with that observation to a degree. But on the other hand, over in Europe they have talking ducks and Asterix. Once people see

# STAN LEE
## —CREATOR—

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*"The general feeling I get is that everybody is aiming for an older audience and is trying to stop comics from being on the bottom rung of the cultural totem pole."*

that these colorful cartoon stories can make sense and can be done intelligently, that'll take a little of the curse off them. The time may come when American superhero comics (or you might even want to call them fantasy comics) don't rely so heavily on costumes. There are many less costumes now in the New Universe which Jim Shooter has started at Marvel. If the New Universe does well, that may well be the wave of the future. The New Universe is a nice, daring plan and I certainly hope that it works fantastically.

"After our 25th anniversary, I can understand our guys in the bullpen wanting to launch something new and reaching another plateau in comics. That's probably a good way to go, I've read the first and found them very interesting."

Discussing another series which is getting a lot of attention as being part of the next wave in comic books, Stan agrees that **Dark Knight** may not be as accessible, or easy to follow, for people who aren't used to reading many different kinds of comic books on a regular basis.

"I was with Frank Miller a few weeks ago and was telling him that what he was trying to do was great but that it should have been simplified a little. But that will come. He's just starting with this new technique and he will master it more and more as he moves along and gets more experience. But I applaud what he's trying to do. I'm a big fan of his, just as I am of the new talented guys. Guys like Byrne, Miller, Walt Simonson and others are doing just great stuff. More important than the individual stories that they're doing is the style that they're setting, just like years ago when I thought that Steranko was so good in what he was trying to do, and Neal Adams and others. There are always certain people who seem to be striving for something a little different—a little more cinematic, a little more adult and dramatic. Sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't, but as long as they're trying, that's the important thing."

What does Stan think that comics will have achieved in another 25 years? Perhaps a great deal more than they have in the past 50.

"I would imagine that if they keep going the way they are that in another 25 years they'll be totally recognized and accepted. They'll be on sale in hardcover books. They're now starting to be seen in bookstores—Waldenbooks and B. Dalton's and some of the other chains have started to carry them. If the quality holds up or if it keeps improving—at some point it will level off and they'll decide how comics should be. Probably there'll be a juvenile line, a regular line and an ultra-sophisticated line. That's my guess. How will it all turn out, nobody really knows. But I think we're going in that direction.

"Comics can go almost anywhere they want to go because they're such a popular form of entertainment. As long as they're reasonably well done, young people will always like them. After awhile there may be very little difference in form between the graphic novel and comic books. The way graphic novels are done now, they're really just comic books printed on better paper.

"Little by little the motion picture companies will start looking more closely at the new comic books and try to buy the rights to them. In 25 years comic books will take their place alongside other literature. The nice thing is that if I'm wrong, 25 years from now nobody will remember that I said that!"

COMICS FEATURE

50th issue

# MIKE KALUTA
## —ARTIST—

Michael Kaluta began working in comics in the late Sixties along with several other artists, including Berni Wrightson, clearly influenced by Al Williamson, Frank Frazetta and the E.C. Comics gang. Kaluta worked for D.C. on an adaptation of Edgar Rice Burroughs' **Pirates of Venus**, drew a slew of covers for their mystery/horror titles and several issues of **The Shadow**. Recently he drew the **Starstruck** series for Epic Comics and, along with Wrightson, is working on a new Shadow graphic novel for Marvel as well as The Rocketeer series for Comico Comics.

"I only read about three comics these days," Kaluta admits, "so I don't know what's really happening in most comic books. I read **Love & Rockets**, but then everyone expects it to be good so they're not raving about it any more.

"My personal opinion of **Dark Knight** is that I can't read it because the artwork is not acceptable to me. It looks to me like comics are going in the direction that you don't have to draw any more — the writing is important. That's an interesting change from when I came in. Back then the writing didn't matter at all — the drawing was what mattered. Now it doesn't matter at all what the drawing's like. In some of these thing's it's drawings that would have been turned down by fanzines. As time goes by it seems that more books get written better but drawn worse. So it looks like it's a trend."

He does find exceptions, but he doesn't see them creating a movement.

"**The Watchmen** is beautifully drawn and written — but how many spinoffs do you think will come from that?"

He supports the idea of doing comics which are better written but feels that when he tried to do that with his **Starstruck** series, no one paid any attention to it.

"It seems like pure sour grapes on my part but a couple years ago everybody was yelling: We want a comic book that we can sink our teeth into! Well I think that Elaine and I gave them one but they didn't even discuss it. No reviews, nothing. We got an interview in **Comics Journal** but that's it — the end. But they're still talking over and over again about the things they don't like. It's like **The Comics Journal** is only happy if things are being done that they don't care for."

And so it goes.

# MIKE GRELL
## —STORYTELLER—

Mike Grell has been a creative force in comics for years. He originated the **Warlord** at DC and it remains successful long after he departed the book—but his influence is still clearly felt on the title. For a time he drew such characters as Green Lantern and Batman before going on to create **Starslayer**, another title carried on by others in the path he set prior to his departure, and **Jon Sable** for First Comics. Recently he returned to DC for the chance to do a mini-series featuring Green Arrow, an old favorite of his.

"One of the things that always appealed to me about Green Arrow was that he doesn't have a superpower," explains Grell. "He's just a hell of a good archer. But now he's going to lose all of those trick arrows and there won't be much in the way of supervillains at all—like none!

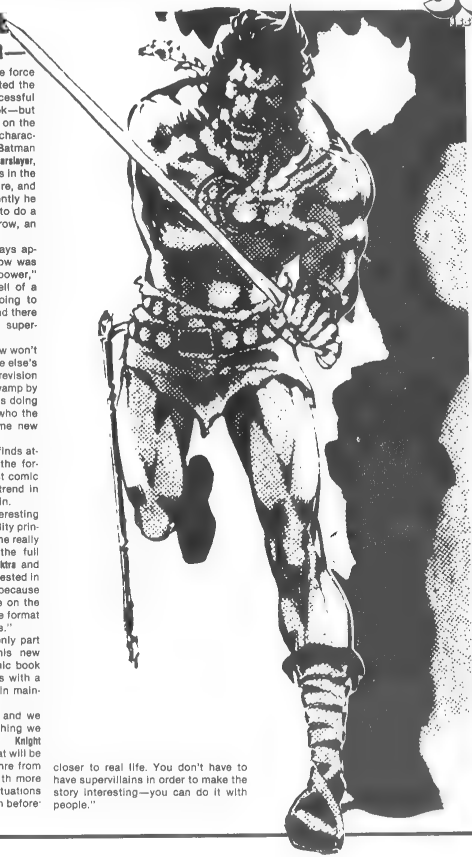
"My continuity of Green Arrow won't have anything to do with anyone else's continuity of him. It's a minor revision of the character—not a total revamp by any means or like what Byrne is doing on **Man of Steel**. It's redefining who the character is—establishing some new things."

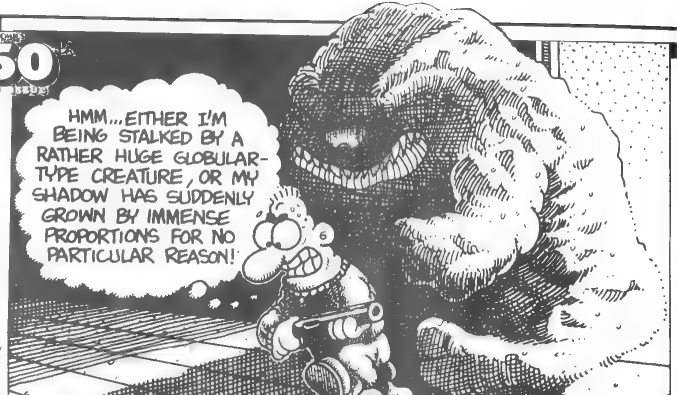
One of the things that Grell finds attractive about this project is the format, one superior to what most comic books are granted. This is a trend in publishing he's very interested in.

"What I see that's really interesting is the switchover to higher quality printing formats. You're seeing some really good work coming out like the full color that's being done in **Elektra** and **Dark Knight**. I'm particularly interested in the **Dark Knight** packaging because that's what we're going to use on the Green Arrow project—the same format of 48 page, perfect bound books."

But superior packaging is only part of what interests Grell in his new series. He also feels that comic book stories can now tackle themes with a new depth previously unseen in mainstream American comic books.

"The lid has just come off and we can do just about any damn thing we please in comics. **Dark Knight** established parameters for what will be accepted in that particular genre from now on. We can do stories with more adult themes. Language and situations can be much more intense than before: closer to real life. You don't have to have supervillains in order to make the story interesting—you can do it with people."

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HMM...EITHER I'M BEING STALKED BY A RATHER HUGE GLOBULAR-TYPE CREATURE, OR MY SHADOW HAS SUDDENLY GROWN BY IMMENSE PROPORTIONS FOR NO PARTICULAR REASON!
GEBS HANLEY

# TONY CAPUTO
## —PUBLISHER—

Now Comics, one of the new independent specialty market publishers on the block with such tifties as **Vector, Eb'nn, Syphons, Ralph Snart Adventures** and the forthcoming **Valor Thunderstar and His Fireflies** in it's roster has some definite ideas on how to change how comic books are perceived and sold in America.

In describing the policies and ideas that motivate his company, Caputo states, "Now Comics is very creator-oriented in that the creators own the rights to their characters. We're trying to introduce comics to outlets outside of comics fandom, especially with the Now Library. The advertising is going to be dramatically different in that it will be marketed as a sophisticated novel with pictures. Other companies are also dabbling in this area, such as Comico with their **Mage** paperback.

"**Mirrorwalker** is a unique and innovative comic book in that it uses full color photographs as the background and animation cels for the characters. Those will be sold in Waldenbooks and we're talking to Berkley about distribution as well."

Also forthcoming is **Silverwing**, the graphic novel. "This is going to prove that you don't have to have a color comic to make it look good. Black and white comics can be very appealing and entertaining, too.

"What I'd like Now Comics to be is more entertaining over a wider age bracket," Caputo adds. "In other words, you can start reading it very young and yet not get sick of it by age 15. I'd like something a little more in-depth with more commentary. Now Comics covers are very 'designey.' More quality-oriented on white, textured paper."

Caputo sees some of the things he wants to do happening now with other publishers as well, such as over at DC with **The Watchmen** and **Dark Knight**.

"Comic book readers have matured and they're looking for something a little more sophisticated—with a little more depth. The fact that Frank Miller was able to do something like that is going to open up a large gap to be filled with that type of material. Superheroes in general have just gotten completely away from what they were originally supposed to be. The Marvel Universe was supposed to be this universe, and all of a sudden they introduce the New Universe. What happened to the Marvel Universe? It became a universe which is not here any more—it wasn't realistic any more. It just got lost. That's what something like the **Dark Knight** and **The Watchmen** series are even though the **Watchmen** is in another universe. It seems more realistic as it relates to people and the subjects it's dealing with."

COMICS FEATURE 50th Issue

# FRANK BRUNNER
## —ILLUSTRATOR—

Artist Frank Brunner first began working in magazines such as **Castle of Frankenstein** where he displayed an extraordinary talent for rendering evocative black and white art. His work was also seen in such horror magazines as **Web of Horror** and **Creepy** before appearing in color comic books. Brunner may be best known for **Howard the Duck** and related duck posters and material. He left the title, which was recently the basis for a George Lucas film, when Steve Gerber objected to his being a bit too creative and adding things that weren't in the scripts. Believing comics to be a collaborative medium, Brunner moved on to do other strips. In recent years he drew the first several issues of **Warp** for First Comics as well as an independently-published graphic novel, **Seven Samurai**. He has also done art portfolios including one consisting of several outstanding full color paintings based on Michael Moorcock's Elric stories. Presently Brunner describes himself as "vacationing in the animation industry," where he has done concept drawings for the new Hanna-Barbera **Jonny Quest** series. He hopes to do another **Seven Samurai** book and has still other unrevealed new projects in mind.

"Where I see comic books going now is probably something that other people have noticed as well," Brunner states. "The days of the big-selling titles are over. We're dealing with a lot of special interest groups.

"We're getting some interesting different kinds of comics," he continues, "like **Love & Rockets** which are aimed at a certain group. Then you have **X-Men** which appeals to teenagers. It's broken up to where no one title is a great seller just like what's happened in the magazine market. The fact is that you used to have **Life** magazine which appealed to everyone but now it's just special interest magazines. As far as subject matter goes, that's an interesting development because we can get away a bit from superheroes."

What does Brunner find interesting that's going on today?

"Mostly it's small publications, the independents, a few titles from Eclipse and Comico. Other than that I really don't see much coming out that's interesting except the higher-priced items from DC or Marvel's Epic line.

"I look with interest on what Miller is doing on Batman and DC's mini-series line. That's what filters through to me. I'd like to see more independents in the business. Marvel controlling seventy percent of the marketplace is not a good thing. When more competition develops, that's when creativity happens!"

VERY WELL. COVE--THE PASSAGE IS RIGHT HERE.
IMPRESSIVE ISN'T IT?.. ALL DONE WITH MIRRORS..
THE ONLY THING IS, THIS PART OF THE MAZE SHOULD BE FILLED WITH MOLTEN LAVA--IT MUST BE SOME TRICK OF XANDER'S
CHAOS--
--SO FAR NONE OF YOUR "TRAPS" HAVE MATERIALIZED! I'M BEGINNING TO THINK YOU'RE JUST A CRAZY BASTARD!
LET'S LEAVE MELLE JUDGEMENTS OUT OF THIS--

COMICS FEATURE

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# ARCHIE GOODWIN
## —EDITOR—

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*"...one of the main things that's happened to comics over the past 20 years is the expansion into new formats...the increasing variety in packaging which in turn leads to different kinds of what used to be one basic product."*

Over the past 30 years that he has been working in comics as a writer and editor, Archie Goodwin has seen a lot of trends come and go, helping launch a few himself. He was the driving force behind the black and white Warren horror comic magazines of the early '60s. In the early '70s, he joined with Walt Simonson to create one of the true classic comic stories of all time—The Manhunter Saga. Reprinted twice—once in black and white, once in color—it is one of the ten finest comics stories to appear during that decade.

Being editor of both **Epic Illustrated** and the Epic Comics line has kept his own writing to a minimum since, until his recent creation of **Nightmask** for Marvel's New Universe. When asked what there is about **Nightmask** that sets it apart from both regular Marvel comics and the more experimental material in the Epic line, Goodwin pauses for a moment, replying, "That's a good question. I think that it gives me a chance to deal with a character who is somewhat like a superhero without having worldly superpowers. It gives me a chance to do stories with a psychological edge as well as straightforward adventure.

"There's no reason why **Nightmask** couldn't have been done as an Epic Comic or even as a Marvel Comic," Goodwin reveals, "but since we were creating a new line of titles and looking for a new character to fit in there, it seemed the perfect opportunity to do **Nightmask**. He fits in better in the New Universe because we already have Dr. Strange and a number of other characters who can move about in dream worlds in the Marvel Universe. So **Nightmask** would have had less of a chance to to stand out as just another Marvel title than as one of the New Universe books. There it has a better chance for people to focus on it and give it a try."

As editor of the Epic line, Goodwin has the inside track on helping creators retain the ownership of their work.

"We were not the first ones to do that, but we were certainly at the forefront," Goodwin states, "and if the majors are Marvel and DC, then we were the first major company to offer creator-owned books. Epic has also had impact on doing very forward-looking books. There was a time when I couldn't have imagined anyone doing a book like **Moonshadow**. **Elektra** is pushing the edges of the envelope, expanding storytelling horizons."

Addressing the topic of which books today are part of the next creative wave in comics, Goodwin adds that, "DC's new **Watchmen** is certainly one. It'll take awhile to see, but Marvel's New Universe books are all projects that take the most popular comic book subject matter—the superhero—and attempt to explore them in much more realistic ways. Alan Moore's work on **Miracleman**, like the New Universe titles, is an attempt to make a more realistic context for a superpowered individual and to explore their impact on the society they live in."

The Epic Comics line is only the most recent exploration of new formats Goodwin has been connected with. In the early '60s, he edited the cornerstone issues of **Creepy** and **Eerie**, drawing on his personal contacts with such talents as Al Williamson, Wally Wood, Steve Ditko, Gray Morrow and John Severin.

"That, to a certain extent, was an experiment for the time," he explains. "We were doing a black and white magazine-sized horror comic without the code in what was a more expensive format for 1964. Essentially what seems to be one of the main things that's happened to comics over the past 20 years is the expansion into new formats. It took quite awhile and the advent of the direct sales market (the comics specialty shops) to give a focus where comic buyers could be exposed to specially packaged products and could show some support for them. That's been one of the most important things—the increasing variety in packaging which in turn leads to different kinds of what used to be one basic product. It started out as a 10 cent pulp paper comic book and that will probably remain the most popular format, but as each new format springs up it means new people designing them and new characters, and that's good!"

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# CHRIS CLAREMONT —WRITER—

Writer of the **X-Men** for the past decade, Claremont created **The New Mutants**, a title which, in its own right, is telling stories as powerful as any ever presented in the elder mutant title. Recently he removed Prof. X from the storyline, and has no plans to bring him back. He had a reformed Magneto fill the vacant position as head of the school and father figure to the young mutants. At present Claremont is involved with what has been called the "Mutant Massacre," although he is quick to point out that this doesn't necessarily mean that he's going to kill any X-Men.

"I never said I was killing anyone off," Claremont insists. "We're removing three people from the team, but that doesn't necessarily mean that they're going to die. It's to shake up the reality—to see how the book would function with a different mix of characters or how I would function with a different mix of characters. Why should the X-Men stay the same simply because the mix works? If we changed the original X-Men after ten years, why not the new ones?"

Regarding the darker slant of some current comics, Claremont takes an iconoclastic creative view, exemplified by his reply, "So what? This is presumably Alan's and Frank's views of those characters and those particular stories. If anyone disagrees, they should write a story exemplifying their own world view. To say that (it signifies a darker trend in comics) is as absurd as saying that Hemingway is all macho or Faulkner is all Southern degeneracy. That's artistic vision!

"It's only a trend in that people who aren't that good will try to copy the form without getting the substance so you'll get a lot of superficially grim stories. Writers who are good, who are worth the name, will write stories. Whether they're light or dark depends on the writer's approach to the story. I don't think that any editor or publisher is saying: Write stories in this vein! That would be absurd."

Although Claremont occasionally strays into outright fantasy in his stories (such as with **New Mutants Special Edition 1**), this isn't because he finds the superhero concept restrictive.

"I don't see the format as restrictive, per se," Claremont states. "It's as restricting as you're going to let it be. Alan Moore is expanding it in one direction. I think that Frank Miller and Bill Sienkiewicz (in **Elektra**) are expanding it in another. It's a matter of having an artistic vision and going with it—seeing where it takes you. Dealing with characters as honestly as you can. How would the X-Men relate to this situation? How would they relate to this new team? How would this team relate to the original team? How would the New Mutants relate to all these changes? It's the same reason for replacing Xavier with Magneto—making Magneto the headmaster of the school creates a whole mass of internal, inherent contradictions and therefore conflicts that could be good for the book that didn't exist when Xavier was headmaster. The idea is to shake up reality as much as possible because out of chaos would come conflict, and out of conflict, change. Or change breeds chaos breeds conflict and its ongoing process—like life. Not very profound,

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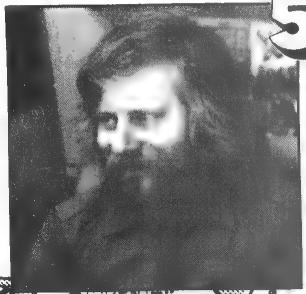
but true. There's no reason you should be tied down by anything or limited by anything, other than the character's own characterizational reality. Beyond that, anything goes."

Claremont sees the current expansion into different formats as a good idea.

"There's a lot more options for producing books now. The **Dark Knight** format, the Epic Comics format, **Elektra Assasin**, the graphic novels...It doesn't have to be just a traditional open-ended series, 32 pages on newsprint. Now that you've got improved technical abilities, the next step is actually to come up with better stories to put in them!"



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*"There are more well-versed creative writers working in the industry now. Current storylines are more complicated, delving into areas of human nature that have never been explored before."*

# BRENT ANDERSON

## —ARTIST—

Highly respected for his work on such titles as **Ka-Zar**, **Somerset Holmes** and the X-Men graphic novel, Brent Anderson recently committed himself to drawing **Strikeforce: Moriturl** for Marvel. He was attracted to the monthly comic book series because it is different than the typical superhero fare.

"I was a little leery when I first read it because it's about superheroes who die within a year. In the wrong hands, it could have become an opportunistic death-of-the-month comic book where the readers are kept on the edge of their seats wondering which hero is going to die this month. Death is dealt with in comics rather frivolously. It seems almost arbitrary—they kill someone off whenever the sales are low. I didn't want to deal with a book that was geared towards that," notes Anderson, "but after reading the premise, I found it very intriguing. After meeting Peter Gillis (the writer) and visiting with him for 3 days, I came to realize that he had a real good handle on how to write this.

"The book is about life, not death. It's about dealing with death, not death itself. It was so intriguing I just had to do it. This book is as close as any superhero comic has ever come to true science speculation. Of course we can't get as indepth as a science fiction novel does, but Peter's providing enough templates to add a lot of science fiction elements in the guise of superheroes."

What drew Anderson to this series is the same thing that attracts him to any project, the chance to do stories about real human beings.

"The stories are about real people dealing with death and the risks people take in life. It's sort of an analogy to life in the sense that we all take risks. The characters volunteer to sacrifice their longevity defending the Earth from an alien invasion. It really is a book about people and how they deal with problems. That was what attracted me to the original premise. If I'm given a story that I'm interested in drawing but it doesn't have those elements in it, I always insist that those elements be put in by the writer. It's very tedious to draw one punchout scene after another or have characters do things that real people just don't do. When something runs against my natural instincts when something is written that doesn't really play as being real life—then it bothers me," explains Anderson.

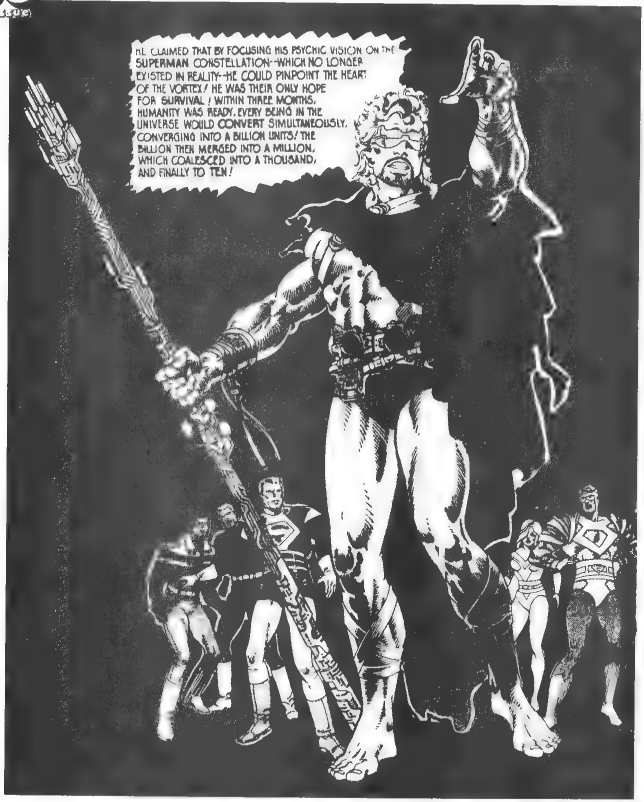
"Writers have always tried to write realistic, natural characters. No writer sets out to write bad stuff. Some are more skillful than others. There are more well-versed creative writers working in the industry now. Current storylines are more complicated, delving into areas of human nature that have never been explored before. In the past, comics had been aimed at a children's market and they had to be simple, but that market's growing up. There are older readers now who require a bit more indepth exploration of human nature than children can understand or handle. It'll be interesting to see which niche **Moriturl** gets placed in. The stories are being written for an adult audience, but it has all the trappings and visual images of the adolescent power fantasy—the superheroes. I am purposely drawing the book in a straightforward storytelling style with very little experimentation in graphic technique. It's basic panel to panel story continuity. I'm trying to be as clear as possible because the concepts are a little bit complicated. The emotions the characters go through are complicated. The more complicated the story, the simpler its vision should be. If a story is simple, then I can use complicated ways to tell that simple story and it will flow, but when both the story and the storytelling get complicated it gets very hard to understand. Very esoteric. Peter and I agreed that **Moriturl** should use very straight storytelling."

Whose comics does Anderson like and explore? Like some creators, he's interested in things quite different from what he generally illustrates.

"I like **Tales of the Beanworld** and **'Mazing Man**, because these books deal with human qualities. Even though **Beanworld** is about beans in their own little world, there is an internal consistency and logic about it and the characters involved start to grow on you; they start to develop little personalities, and as I said earlier, I like to read those kinds of stories.

"**'Mazing Man** is just a delightful book to kick back with after a hard day.

"I'm intrigued by books like **Moonshadow** and **Elektra** because the artwork is so nicely done. I can look at the beautiful art as each issue comes out and when the entire series is out I can go back and read it all at once and see if there's really any true story structure and cohesive writing. So far both of those books have been pretty to look at but difficult to read. But I'll withhold my judgment until after I've read the whole series. I would never expect someone to judge **Somerset Holmes** based on reading one issue, so I should extend the same courtesy to **Moonshadow** and **Elektra**."


HE CLAIMED THAT BY FOCUSING HIS PSYCHIC VISION ON THE SUPERMAN CONSTELLATION--WHICH NO LONGER EXISTED IN REALITY--HE COULD PINPOINT THE HEART OF THE VORTEX! HE WAS THEIR ONLY HOPE FOR SURVIVAL! WITHIN THREE MONTHS, HUMANITY WAS READY. EVERY BEING IN THE UNIVERSE WOULD CONVERT SIMULTANEOUSLY, CONVERGING INTO A BILLION UNITS! THE BILLION THEN MERGED INTO A MILLION, WHICH COALESCED INTO A THOUSAND, AND FINALLY TO TEN!

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COMICS FEATURE 50th issue

*"A kid will go down to the local convenience store and instead of hitting the newsstand rack, there'll be a card close to the cash register with very small pill-like objects..."*

# JIM STERANKO
## GRAPHIC ILLUSTRATOR —AND DESIGNER—

In the late Sixties, Jim Steranko was a one man mini-revolution in comics. Combining style and sensibility strongly influenced by Jack Kirby with his own unique personal vision of comics he crafted adventures of Nick Fury and Captain America that continue to inspire and influence artists today. Even though Steranko no longer has his hand in comics the way he used to, his love for the medium is just as strong as ever and he continues to follow it closely.

"There has been a trend over the last decade towards better art and I see that as a leaning towards more illustrative sensibilities than two decades ago," Steranko states. "From my own point of view, an influence by illustrators from the paperback field on through magazine illustration, movie posters and book covers was dominant. Then the emergence in the field of such people as Neal Adams and Barry Windsor-Smith helped to bring the level of illustration to a sustained high.

"Still, I'm not sure that it ever reached the level that it did in the Fifties with EC art — Wally Wood, Johnny Severin, Will Elder, Al Williamson and Jack Davis were the most realistic draftsmen there and they set a consistent pace that has been very tough to beat, although certainly it has been along the way by a number of artists. Then, of course, the massive Kirby influence, which is half realistic and half cartoonist, has been carried on by a hundred artists.

"What I like about Sienkiewicz work, and Frank Miller and Paul Smith and a lot of other artists is that they're always looking to expand the form. This is very true of Craig Russell. Craig has consistently widened the perimeters. Every book he turns out has something new in it. Craig continues to surprise his audience and that's something that very few comics artists can say. He does it consciously and I'm not saying that it always succeeds, but he does succeed a lot and continues to open up that form. He's one of my top three favorites in comics right now. I like to be surprised if I spend a two dollar bill — don't you?

"Occasionally we can admire something that's in a new book, but it doesn't surprise us — it's nothing that we haven't seen before. Perhaps what I like least about comics these days is the lack of sensible storytelling. I find that most artists don't know what in the hell they're doing in terms of telling a story. They just don't know what panels to juxtapose against each other for maximum dramatic effect. I think that's comics' weakest area and it may continue to be. Fortunately we have a handful of artists and writers who understand those sensibilities and give us good, clean, interesting, entertaining books. I think that Harvey Kurtzman is a fine storyteller and certainly Alex Toth tells a story very well. John Buscema tells a story smoothly — he never lets you down. I think that he's probably the consumate comic artist —he's fast, draws figures well and knows how to tell a story.

"As far as thematic trends, I don't think it's really changed too much. More artists, writers and publishers have taken the easy way out by doing either science fiction or superheroes. You have to work a lot harder with other genres like the mystery genre or for a mainstream type of book like the Hernandez Brothers do. Frequently in their work in **Love & Rockets**, I see no reason why it should be drawn. It might work best as a paperback book. Frequently the art doesn't modify the story enough to warrant being drawn.

"I think that the future of comics will be a lot like what we've seen in the past. There has been a negligible amount of really adult, sophisticated material and I don't mind that. I think that comics for kids are perfectly fine. It's a terrific form. There's no reason why Superman can't still be the same Superman in the same format two more centuries from now."

But Steranko predicts that some things will change — such as the way that comics are presented.

"The advance that I do see is in the medium itself. Paper will be obsolete at some time and we'll be seeing the advent of the electronic comic. A kid will go down to the local convenience store and instead of hitting the newsstand rack, there'll be a card close to the cash-register with very small pill-like (no larger than an aspirin tablet) objects that'll probably cost several dollars each. In his back pocket, the kid'll have a portable tv set that he'll unroll — it'll be about the size of a comic book now but it'll be flexible and he'll punch one of these little pills in the top and it'll have words, music, sound effects and images. It would be something that he could control—go backwards, forwards, hold it at a particular spot and run it any time he wants. This is what comics give us — an availability — and the availability will have to stay, otherwise you can just throw a cassette into the VCR."

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# CHARLES VESS —ILLUSTRATOR—

A stylist who evokes images both powerful and ethereal, Charles Vess has not been seen in a lot of major comic titles because they deal in areas he's just not very interested in. "I enjoy almost anything better than superheroes," he admits, realizing that this limits his own commercial possibilities in mainstream comics. "Give me a good funny animal comic book," he adds in describing what he would prefer to read given a choice.

Stories of the weird and fantastic are what fans have largely seen of his work, including several pieces in Marvel's **Epic Illustrated**. But he also drew a recent back-up story in an issue of **Spider-Man**, revealing the kinds of stories which the web-slinger's new black costume can lead to. Stories of mood and mystery.

"I find myself attracted to things on the fringe," he explains. "I'm not really attracted to mutants and I don't enjoy superheroes that much, even though I drew a Spider-Man story."

Dealing with what's happening in comics today, Vess continues his drift away from the mainstream into areas where truly different things are being done.

"One of my favorite things is **Silent Invasion** (from Renegade Press). I think it's wonderfully funny and has great drawing! I really enjoy it. What I don't enjoy are people with guns shooting people or big, fat squat superheroes like Dark Knight.

"I'm more interested in atmosphere and mood. It doesn't have to be fantasy although I enjoy drawing it and it really appeals to me. The work that I like is the work that creates an entire atmosphere and environment for itself. If I can't believe that you can walk past the edge of the panel and the world will keep going — then I don't really enjoy the piece, it's a weird criteria, but that's the way I look at it.

"**The Watchmen** is something else I really look forward to. I usually enjoy getting anything that Craig Russell does. I also like Alan Moore's writing on **Swamp Thing** as well as the Gladstone Disney reprints. I like some of the French stuff that was reprinted over here as **The Survivor**."

The next work we'll be seeing from Vess is a Tales of Asgard spinoff called **Warriors Three**, a mini-series.

"It's a comic opera — very silly and a funny story. I really enjoyed doing it and it'll probably be out next summer.

"I want to get more into writing my own work," the artist adds, "Probably I'll be working more for the independent publishers because you can do quirkier things and I like stories where you're going to be surprised. Things are done for Marvel and DC that are corporate decisions so that you can only do certain things with the characters. You know that they're not going to kill Batman or Thor or that if they do, he's not going to go: 'What a great character!' Then bring it back to life. But if it's a personal creation then whoever's dead is dead! I enjoy personal insights rather than committee decisions. That's from my fine arts background. It does me horrible sometimes because I can't be as commercial as I like."

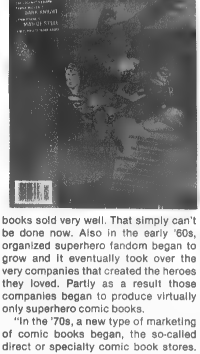
And yet, even though Vess recognizes that superheroes are what's commercially viable right now, he doesn't feel that it's good for the industry in the long run. People keep trying to find the right property to break through the superhero barrier into the real world of bestseller success.

"They keep trying, but even Frank Miller, the bestseller, tried to do it with **Ronin** and nobody bought it. But he does Batman and everybody buys it—and now they're buying **Ronin**! As long as you have the audience that's already there and you don't go for anybody else, it's just going to be superheroes in the books." Explaining the shortcomings of this he points out that no mainstream publisher would consider the sales figures of superheroes to be anything to brag about.

"For someone to publish a mainstream book and brag about 700 thousand people buying it is ridiculous because there's more people than that on the New York Subway. There's millions and millions of people out there and some of them really enjoy comics, but they're not going to pick them up at present."

Maybe superheroes really aren't so super after all?

## HAPPY HAL



"You really want to know what the future of comic books will be. Well, it depends on a number of very variable factors," was Happy Hal's clear and unequivocal answer to the central question of this issue's special feature.

"The first major factor is format. This is very important not only because of the difference it can make in printing and appearance, but even on the types of material that can be done," he elaborates.

"At one time there were a lot more pages in a comic book—64 was typical. As a result every single comic book had a number of stories in each issue. This allowed all sorts of different types of stories and themes and characters to be explored. Most of these stories simply cannot be done in thinner books. While a publisher can afford to sandwich an odd short story in between several popular heroes that everyone is anxious to buy, they can't afford to publish them on their own. They will not generate enough sales to survive. Back in the early '60s, comic books began to pull an incredible shrinking act. Even as prices climbed, the page counts rapidly declined, shrinking from 28 to 22 to 18 to 17. It almost seemed that we would soon be buying them by the page. Several experiments were tried with larger page counts for a higher price but they never went over. Readers wanted to spend less and get less it seems," Hal points out.

"Another major factor is marketing, the way in which the comic books are sold in order to reach the potential reader," Hal continues.

"At one time comic books were a mass market item with a number of books selling in the millions. Comic book stories had to be designed to appeal to a large across-the-board audience. This put limitations on the kinds of stories that could be told. There was one almost opposite effect caused by the same factor though. Because there was such a large group of readers, there was support for many kinds of stories. In those days a Disney comic book could be a top seller, western and horror and romance titles sold—all sorts of different kinds of books sold very well. That simply can't be done now. Also in the early '60s, organized superhero fandom began to grow and it eventually took over the very companies that created the heroes they loved. Partly as a result those companies began to produce virtually only superhero comic books.

"In the '70s, a new type of marketing of comic books began, the so-called direct or specialty comic book stores. Those outlets supposedly give a means to sell a much greater variety of material in comic book form. And temporarily they seem to be doing that. But the comic shops suffer from the same problem as the mass market now does, their customers just want superheroes. All of the books which garner high sales figures are superheroes of one sort or another, whether anthropomorphic or not, and those that are not are rapidly replaced on publishers' schedules. Even those publishers of color comic books that started out in order to provide an alternative to the run-of-the-mill superhero fare fall into the trap, or resort to printing lots of reprints to make ends meet. While there is currently a boom in black-and-white comic books of all kinds, I predict a major bust ahead. There is simply too much garbage coming out in that format because it is cheap to do. And the fans are catching on...and the dealers shelves are loading up. Hopefully, none of the good stuff will get hurt with the bad, but I fear that that may happen.

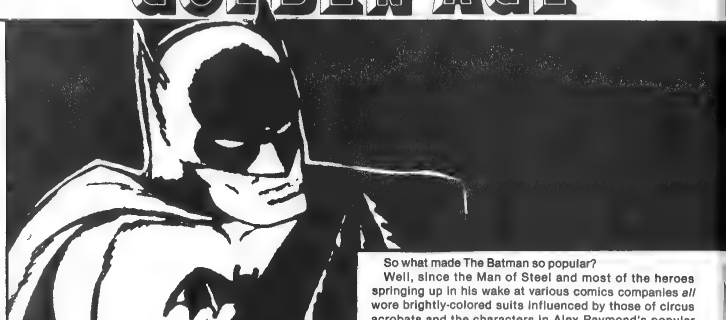
"Lots of people see the specialty shops as the wave of the future and predict that eventually all comic books will be sold that way. Even one of the big two publishers is quickly shifting more and more of their output into that category. If that happens that would be truely sad as it would mark the end of comic books as an item of broad interest. And it could eventually even mark the end of comic books since there would be no recruiting ground for new readers. The comic shops aren't good at doing that as most of their customers are the already-committed," Hal notes.

"Despite the rounds of self-congratulations that seem to be sweeping the industry, I don't think that comic books have really improved. While I certainly enjoy the works of talented people like Frank Miller and John Byrne and Chris Claremont, they really aren't better than a lot of the old pros. Eisner and Canlff and Grandenetti and lots of the others still stand up well. No one has touched Barks or Kurtzman or some of the others. Kirby, in many ways, is still definitive. Lee's work matches the best of what's now being done. And he was writing virtually every story for an entire comic book company! There was the period at DC in the '60s when the art was handled by Infantino, Kane, Sekowsky and Kubert and the writers included Binder, Fox, Hamilton and Broome. That was some line up! Some of the newer guys like Miller are trying out interesting new tricks but they haven't mastered them yet. Some of the storytelling is a bit murky.

"The best of what is being done now stands up well to the best work of the past and overall the quality is high. While we should not forget the masterpieces that make up the find traditions of the four color world—both comic book and strip—we can take pride in what is being done today!"

# LOOKING BACK ON THE GOLDEN AGE

BY ROY THOMAS



When planes of the Imperial Japanese Navy bombed Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, on that Sunday morning in December of 1941, Batman had already been on duty for two and a half years.

They had been exciting, eventful years for Bob Kane's already popular creation.

Beginning with the May 1939 issue of **Detective Comics**, Batman (or "The Batman," as he was called with decreasing frequency as time went by) had quickly become a strip to be reckoned with. Though his first recorded exploit was only six pages long, the editors of the company that was to become DC Comics, Inc., even gave him the cover spot for that 27th issue debut. It proved a limelight he was to enjoy on nearly all covers for the next five decades.

(By contrast, his masked predecessor in **Detective**, The Crimson Avenger, was cover-featured only twice in his several-year career.)

"The Case of the Chemical Syndicate" wasn't really that much of an adventure, either, as readers of its recent retelling by Marshall Rogers, Terry Austin and Ye Writer in DC's **Secret Origins 6** some months ago may judge for themselves. It was not even Batman's first "chronological" adventure, since in it Police Commissioner Gordon obviously already had heard of "this fellow they call the 'Bat-Man.'"

Yet, somehow, the character instantly caught the fancy first of his publishers and editors, then of the reading public itself — quickly outstripping every other costumed hero in the comics of the 1940s with the exception of Superman and, for a few years there, Fawcett Comics' Captain Marvel.

So what made The Batman so popular?

Well, since the Man of Steel and most of the heroes springing up in his wake at various comics companies *all* wore brightly-colored suits influenced by those of circus acrobats and the characters in Alex Raymond's popular "Flash Gordon" comic-strip, it can't just have been the outfit, good as it was.

And since The Crimson Avenger and The Sandman (who debuted only one month after Batman) never began to approach Bats' meteoric popularity, it wasn't just the fact that here was a comic-book hero who, like the pulps' Shadow and radio's Green Hornet, was a vulnerable human being rather than a bulletproof hunk.

Personally, I suspect at least part of the answer is the fact that Batman was the first *non-super-powered* hero in comic-books to don a Superman-style costume...while Sandman and Crimson Avenger remained attired in mere masks and cloaks, which were just too plain and prosaic for the new, exciting world of full-color comics.

Indeed, all one has to do is look at the fact that both Sandman and Crimson Avenger soon dropped their relatively civilian-oriented garb in favor of true "super-hero threads," and the point is made for me.

## THE CREATORS

Of course, there *was* the little matter of the writing and artwork.

Bob Kane, as is well known, started out as a humorous cartoonist, and never really became much of a draftsman. Yet in **Detective** 27 he had already designed a costume which, with very little change, would serve as his grey-and-blue/black-clad creation for the next half century! The gloves would be lengthened and ornamented a bit, the ears would grow shorter and less sinister and that godawful yellow target-circle would be added around the bat symbol on his chest during the mid-1960's...yet no one glancing at the very first drawing of Batman ever published would fail to recognize him at once.

And, perhaps just as importantly, there was Bill Finger.

# BATMAN AT WAR— SORT OF!

Copyright 1966 Marvel Comics

Bill, who passed away a decade or so ago now, had a movie-influenced sense of pacing his scripts which rarely deserted him, and which has influenced virtually all comics writing since his day. It served him well on other strips he would go on to co-create, such as Green Lantern and Wildcat, but it reached its earliest and greatest fruition on Batman.

For some reason **Detective**'s editors didn't notice right away that they had a winning combination in Kane and Finger. So, for the second Batman story, they called on the more experienced writer Gardner F. Fox for the next couple of tales. But soon Finger was back, and he and Kane turned Batman into one of the most recognizable figures in western pop literature.

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## THE FIRST GREAT DAYS

Batman's foes, of course, are both legion and legend. And while villians like The Joker, The Penguin, Two-Face, Catwoman, et al., are justly the most famous of his opponents, Batman did well from the very beginning.

His second and third stories (both by Fox, I believe) introduced the sinister Dr. Death. His third and fourth featured the Monk. And in **Detective 38** (Feb. 1940) he met Hugo Strange for the first time. All three of these arch-enemies have also been called into service in relatively recent issues, against a Batman who supposedly began fighting crime only a few years ago.

(The original 1939 Batman was first killed off in a Justice Society of America adventure in the late 70s then erased from all existence and memory by the 1985 **Crisis On Infinite Earths** series. It is perhaps hard to imagine a less appropriate way to have celebrated DC's first half century of publishing than by retroactively wiping out the original Superman, Batman & Robin and Wonder Woman, but the **Crisis** maxi-series was otherwise a considerable achievement by creators Marv Wolfman and George Perez, even if in the end it created nearly as many problems as it solved.)

But, back to the Golden Age of Comics:

Along the way, somebody decided it was time to give Batman an origin. And so they did, as briefly recounted in **Detective** 33 (Nov. 1939, "The Batman Wars against the Dirigible of Doom").

With its many retellings over the years, that origin is too well known to need detailed repeating here. The gunman's shots at night on a Gotham City street...young Bruce Wayne left a wealthy orphan...his pledge to devote his life to fighting crime...his wish to do so in a costume which would inspire fear in lowlife criminal types...the provident bat flying in his window and inspiring him to become The Batman...these are the stuff of legend.

Anyway, by spring of 1940, Batman was so popular he got his own title — four 13-page stories, every three (and soon every two) months — with his origin recapitulated in that premier issue. By then he'd also helped spawn another innovation — the comic book boy sidekick.

I'm speaking, of course, of Robin the Boy Wonder, who debuted in **Detective 38**, April 1940. And I say "*helped* to spawn" because, one cover-dated month earlier, the very first issue of Timely Comics' **Captain America** had seen the initial appearance of Cap's kid partner Bucky (who, unlike Dick Grayson, was called Bucky whether he was in costume or no).

Interesting that, in all liklihood, the Finger/Kane and Simon/Kirby teams must have hit upon the idea of a masked teenage assistant quite independently of each other, and who's to say which of them had the inspiration first? Does it really matter?

Batman's star continued to rise. The Joker and the other major heavies mentioned above were all unveiled by the end of 1941. By then, too, he had acquired the various other accoutrements usually associated with him: utility belt, Batcave, Batmobile, Batplane.

## THE SUPERMAN CONNECTION

Like Superman, Bruce Wayne's other self became so popular that when, in late 1940, **All Star Comics 3** introduced the Justice Society of America, the first super-hero group, it was decided he was just plain *too* popular to be a fulltime member. When the Atom asked where Superman, Batman, and Robin were, The Flash responded, "Since *we're* all here, somebody's got to look after things and protect people — so they're pretty busy right now!"

DC's star trio did show up briefly in **All Star 7** to help the JSA raise $1,000,000 to help Europe's war orphans in 1941, and in '47 Superman and Batman even appeared prominently in the JSA tale of "Five Drowned Men," but otherwise they left DC's lesser lights (even Wonder Woman!) to do the group thing without them.

Still, Superman, Batman and Robin did become a team of sorts. Starting with the 1940 edition of **World's Fair Comics** and then for a several-decade run in **World's Finest** (originally **World's Best**) **Comics**, the trio first appeared together only on playful, poster-type covers with separate tales inside. This doubtless led to Batman and Robin's guest appearances on Superman's radio show beginning in the mid-40s. Then, from the 1950s on, the three shared adventures in **World's Finest** as one of the most unlikely, yet commercially successful teams in the history of comics!

## TO WAR OR NOT TO WAR

But, back to Batman and Robin on their own:

As war drew closer in Europe and the Far East, Batman's editors and writers faced the flip side of Superman's dilemma.

While the Man of Steel was so powerful that (like the earlier super-man Hugo Danner in Philip Wylie's influential fantasy novel **Gladiator**) he could have dreamed of ending World War Two almost single-handedly, Batman and Robin were definitely at the other end of the spectrum.

Despite his formidable achievements against gun-toting gangsters and costumed villains in his native Gotham City, Batman would have been just another G.I. Joe if pitted against German and Japanese tanks and dive-bombers.

Sure, Batman had used a gun occasionally in the pre-Robin **Detective** tales, and would be seen on one wartime cover firing a machine-gun to promote sales of war bonds. But somehow, seen crouching behind the weapons of war, Batman became just another copy of The Shadow, famous in pulp magazines for his blazing twin .45's.

Worse yet, he became too *real*, for his all-too-human limitations could no longer be ignored.

Far better to see him swinging through the night above the city's skyscrapers via a ropeline which could presumably have been suspended only from an airplane — in the company of a curly-haired youngster who should have been home in bed.

And so DC Comics took the bull by the horns — and largely ignored the whole Second World War!

## GOTHAM CITY AT WAR

While a few DC mystery-men with no more super-powers than Batman had were pummeling Nazis and Japanese by the carload — Americommando and such Simon/Kirby strips as Manhunter and The Boy Commandos spring to mind — Batman and Robin were kept busy battling The Joker **et al.** almost as if Pearl Harbor and even D-Day had never happened.

There were, of course, a reasonable number of stories in which they fought spies, saboteurs, and the like. Not to mention the patriotic war-oriented covers, usually unrelated to anything inside the actual magazine, and which often sported covers featuring our heroes parachuting, driving a jeep or manning the aforementioned machine-gun.

One of the very few war-oriented *stories* was "Swastika over the White House," in **Batman 14** (Dec. '42 — Jan. '43). In it, one Fred Hopper, alias Nazi Fritz Hoffner, gains a job with a Gotham City firm as a newsreel photographer. This gives him both access to filming top-secret defense installations — and numerous chances to try his hand at assassinating Batman.

He fails in both, though. The closest a swastika ever really gets to flying over the Executive Mansion is in fictitious footage cobbled together by the Nazis themselves — while Batman and Robin swing from a swastika-shaped chandelier to bring down the house on the spy ring.

All in all, a tale which definitely failed to live up to its melodramatic title.

The rest of the time, when they weren't simply fighting crooks, the Dynamic Duo did a few "public service"-type stories which emphasized the wartime role of the police department, the harbor patrol, etc.

It was left to Republic Pictures' Batman movie serial of 1943 (starring that bogus Oriental, J. Carroll Naish, as the Japanese super-spy, Dr./Prince Daka) to bring the war to Batman, since Batman obviously wasn't going to the war.

Then came the siege of Berlin...Hiroshima...and peace, after a fashion.

For Batman, it was back to business as usual, except that few readers would have noticed the difference.

And perhaps, all things considered, it's just as well. CF

**ROY THOMAS writes/edits All-Star, Infinity Inc. and Secret Origins for DC and Eltic for First. Previously he introduced both Star Wars and Conan to Marvel where he also served as Editor-In Chief.**

# Animated Antics

JAMES VAN HISE
WITH THANKS TO MARK KAUSLER

Many animation fans long for the time when cartoons had richer animation and artistry. But the fact of the matter is, whether it's limited animation or not isn't the point — and this was proven over 25 years ago, even before limited animation was the order of the day.

**Rocky And His Friends** (later known as **The Bullwinkle Show** in syndication) used extremely limited animation, only about 4 drawings per second, which is less than that used by today's Saturday morning cartoons. but what made it all work was the writing — and the fact that the show's producers, Jay Ward Productions, retained creative control (although the show is owned by General Mills).

**The Bullwinkle Show** has become a cartoon legend and its loyal fans are legion. It's a sassy show whose humor remains just as wise and knowing now as it was when it premiered on ABC September 29, 1959. It ran on ABC until September 1961 when it switched to NBC for two seasons, and a turbulant two seasons it was. Because it was a cartoon show about talking animals, NBC dubbed it as a children's show, which annoyed the producer, Jay Ward. In a 1961 interview, Ward states, "We feel it's adult humor, but NBC can't understand the jokes, so they think it's a children's show. A lot has to do with the fact that our drawing is much simpler than that of the average cartoon show. Since we're drawing for the smaller screen, this is much more effective — because subtle movements that come across so well on movie screens are lost on television. It also makes for a faster pace. We have about three times as much dramaturgy per minute as the average show. That gives us twice as many jokes, and we think it takes a person of more intelligence to catch 'em all."

## THE GENIUS OF JAY WARD

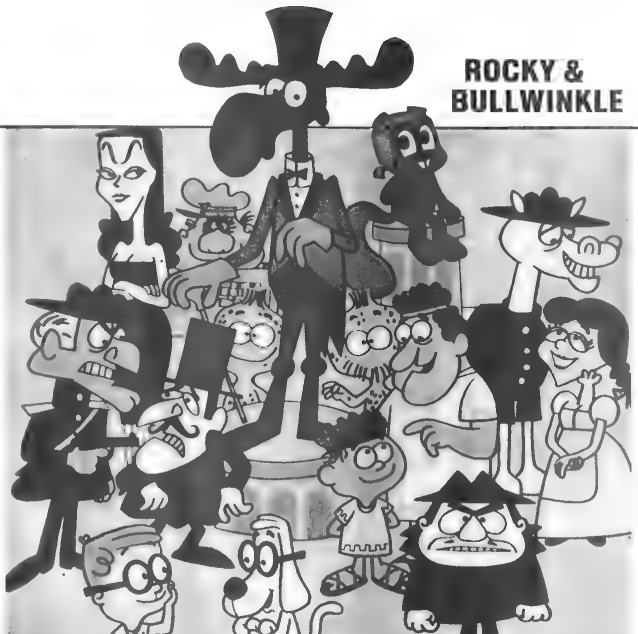
Since those early days when **Rocky And His Friends** was first being aired, Jay Ward has withdrawn from the public eye and become a media recluse — reportedly because he felt burned by interviews which he believed misquoted him and made him look bad. Now Ward won't be interviewed by anyone, even his staunchest admirers.

Born in Berkeley, Ward is an only child whose father was in the real estate business and whose mother was an actress. He grew up in Berkeley and attended the University of California and then the Harvard Business School, not because Harvard is a prestigious school but because he was a fan of the Boston Red Sox and the Boston Braves.

"Naturally I was an admirer of Casey Stengel," Ward says in another 1961 interview. "What a colorful character. At that time I was about the only fan he had."

Returning to California, Ward began to follow in his father's footsteps by opening a real estate agency. But the day it opened, a truck crashed into the office and clipped Ward on the knee putting him in the hospital for six months. When he got out, he'd had a lot of time to ponder real

# ROCKY & BULLWINKLE



estate and decided that it wasn't what he wanted to do. But he kept the office open. "Just in case," he says.

Jay Ward productions was formed in 1958 and their first project was **Rocky And His Friends**, which was developed for General Mills. Following this they invented characters for Quaker Oats such as Quisp, Quake and Captain Crunch. In recent years, this was the only place fans could see new animation from Jay Ward Productions.

Ward's comedic inspirations are such greats as S.J. Perelman, Robert Benchley and James Thurber. He has been described as a man who wants to "debunk, to prick the pompous and laugh at the pretentious. He is also a man of simple faith who believes that the good guys always win in the last reel."

There were 178 half hours of **The Bullwinkle Show** done from 1959-63. They consisted of two episodes of a Rocky and Bullwinkle adventure serial (of which there are a total of 28 different stories), and a revolving set of co-stars including "Fractured Fairytales" (narrated by Edward Everett Horton — who made many film and TV appearances during his life, such as in the original Frank Capra **Lost Horizon**), "Aesop and Son," "The Improbable History of Mr. Peabody" (a super-intelligent dog scientist who adopts a boy, Sherman, whom he found rumaging through garbage cans for food), "Dudley Do-Right" (This tale of a nitwit Canadian Mountie alternated every other show with Peabody), "Mr. Know-It-All" (in which Bullwinkle proves he's not) and "Bullwinkle's Corner" (in which he recited oddball poetry).

**Rocky And His Friends** (as it was originally known) let its lampoons venture far and wide, not even sparing itself as

on one show all-around evil person Boris Badenov rearranged the title lettering to read: "Rocky And His Fiends."

The very first Rocky & Bullwinkle serial is, at 40 episodes, also the longest. Titled "Jet Formula," it introduces the two Moon Men Gidney and Cloide, on Earth to secure a rocket fuel formula which Bullwinkle had inadvertantly concocted. Unfortunately, due to this story's length, it is rarely seen in reruns because of how much trouble the station running the show has to go through to show all of the episodes in order. Most stories run only three to twelve segments long. The 35 episode story about "Upsidaisium" is a victim of the same fate. A few years back, when NBC was rerunning **The Bullwinkle Show** on Saturday morning, they had enough trouble just showing episodes in the right order: one week they skipped an episode and the next week showed the one they'd skipped which actually preceded the one they had shown the week before.

Gidney and Cloide also appear in the story dealing with the mysterios Kurwood Derby, which was invented on the moon and accidentally left on Earth. Whosoever wears the ordinary looking hat immediately becomes a genius — so long as the hat is on their head. An obvious takeoff on the name Durward Kirby (sidekick of comedian Gary Moore on his early Sixties show), Kirby threatened to sue Ward (For lampooning his name?), whereupon Ward offered to pay Kirby's attorney's fees if he kept his promise to sue. Ward would have loved the publicity and no judge in his right

mind would have kept it on his venue for more than 5 minutes. Kirby just let the whole thing drop.

The show was a satire on old cliffhanger serials and on anything else that caught the writers' fancies. The staff consisted of Chris Hayward, Chris Jenkins, Lloyd Turner, George Atkins and Allan Burns, who are now successful in live-action television. But the head writer of the group was the late Bill Scott, who also served as co-producer and was the voice of Bullwinkle himself.

## THE MAN WHO WAS BULLWINKLE

"I have the best job in the world. James Thurber once said that even the most pleasurable of occupations would cloy in time. Well, it hasn't for me. Animation can do anything; it can be anything. It is an art form whose potential has barely been tapped. In spite of the fact that I've been in it for 40 years, I have a feeling that the medium still needs to be explored and widened, and people still need to know much more about it." Thus spoke Bill Scott in a 1984 interview in **California Living**.

Born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Scott attended South High School in Denver and is a graduate of the University of Denver. Scott met Jay Ward in the Fifties while working on a project someone else had commissioned.

"Shamus Culhane wanted a West Coast series and asked Jay to leave Berkeley and come to L.A.," Scott recalled in a 1982 fanzine **Animania**. "Later Jay called me to write an adventure story about a moose and a flying squirrel. Jay began with the Crusader Rabbit." Which was the first cartoon made for television. "He produced it in his garage in Berkeley, he and Alex Anderson. They made no money, but had great people working with them. When they tried to sell a series, one was **Frosbite Falls Follies** — animals in the north woods, running a television station — it didn't get off the ground, but Jay liked two characters — moose and squirrel."

Although Scott was the voice of Bullwinkle and put the words in his mouth, the name came from Jay Ward.

"Bullwinkle is named after a used car dealer in Berkeley," Scott recalled for **Animania**. "Clarence Bullwinkle. Jay used to pass by it on his way to school and he thought it was the funniest name he had ever heard." Scott said that the only name he ever encountered that was funnier was the C.&P. Pontiac dealership in San Fernando. The owner explained that the name was quite legitimate — it was the abbreviations for the two partners names: Cock and Passwater.

Scott recalled what it was like in the voice recording sessions in those days.

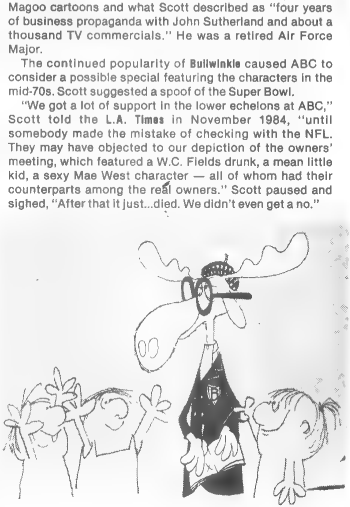
"In recording, we all knew it was funny. The recording sessions were the happiest time of everybody involved. They all said so. Conrad, Paul (Frees — the voice of Boris Badenov) and Hans Conried (Snidely Whiplash in Dudley Do-Right) thought it was the greatest. Bill Conrad (the narrator for the Rocky and Bullwinkle serials) used to come over from shooting, in make-up and girdle, and say it was great to work with people who were professional.

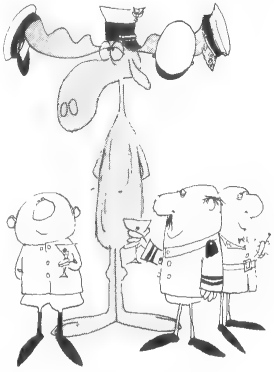
"I was writing a great deal and with the other writers, there was a wealth of material. We recorded at night, two or three times a week, from 7:00 to 9:30 p.m. Everything was done in single takes. We started reading and read to the end of an episode. The only thing Jay might edit in pick-up voices on was a fluff occasionally. Breaking up was a problem. It got so funny, people would feel it — you couldn't resist laughing. Bill Conrad would break up, and although he has this deep voice, he has a high high laugh and when that started..." Conrad played many on-screen roles on TV, such as in the successful series **Canon** where he was a heavyset detective.

Scott's career in animation dates back to his time in the Air Force when he served at the Culver Air Force Base. He then worked at Warner Brothers, did the early Mister Magoo cartoons and what Scott described as "four years of business propaganda with John Sutherland and about a thousand TV commercials." He was a retired Air Force Major.

The continued popularity of **Bullwinkle** caused ABC to consider a possible special featuring the characters in the mid-70s. Scott suggested a spoof of the Super Bowl.

"We got a lot of support in the lower echelons at ABC," Scott told the **L.A. Times** in November 1984, "until somebody made the mistake of checking with the NFL. They may have objected to our depiction of the owners' meeting, which featured a W.C. Fields drunk, a mean little kid, a sexy Mae West character — all of whom had their counterparts among the real owners." Scott paused and sighed, "After that it just...died. We didn't even get a no."





## BULLWINKLE VS. NBC

Stepping on toes and coming up with gags which elicited a collective gasp at the network level was nothing new for the **Bullwinkle** crew. Their clashes with NBC, growing mostly from the fact that they failed to take the National Broadcasting Company as seriously as the network themselves did, is the stuff of legend. In the early Sixties, articles were already writing up the show due to the feathers it had ruffled at NBC.

In 1961, even before **The Bullwinkle Show** aired, NBC objected to a 30-second promotional teaser for the show conceived by Jay Ward Productions. A man-wife cartoon couple are seated before the hearth when he mentions the **Bullwinkle Show**.

SHE: What's a bullwinkle?

HE: Bullwinkle is a moose.

SHE: Then why don't they call it the "Moose Show"?

HE: Whoever heard of a show called the "Moose Show"?

SHE: Whoever heard of a show called the "Bullwinkle Show"?

HE: How'd you like a belt in the mouth?

NBC objected to the violence implicit in the last line stating that, "Wasn't violence something the network was trying to avoid from here on?"

During its first year the show aroused definite ire by using what the network termed "rough language" and

poking fun at the network's color peacock. The U.S. Forestry Service even lodged a complaint with the network when Ward and Scott came up with a character called "Stokey the Bear," who went around starting fires.

But most of the humor that NBC objected to was of the sort that struck a little too close to home. In the early Sixties, NBC was pushing hard the fact that their shows were in color, and basically talking down to anyone who still had a mere black and white tv set. When Prof. Ludwig Von Drake on **Walt Disney's World Of Color** assumed that anyone watching on Black & White could easily visualize the show's color, Ward had Bullwinkle try the same thing, using a slightly different approach. "It's really very easy," Bullwinkle told the viewers. "First think of your income tax. Next Mr. Khrushchev's latest speech. Then think about what Mr. Disney said about your black-and-white set...Makes you see red, doesn't it?" It certainly made NBC see red.

NBC used its red pencil on some scripts, such as one where moose and squirrel parachute into a cannibal pot — one of the oldest bits in cartoons. The network objected because "the need of peoples everywhere to be represented with dignity precludes the out-of-context use of cannibalism." Ward struck back by having the natives redrawn as pale-faced versions of Bill Scott and himself — complete with eyeglasses. Later Ward commented on the minicontroversy by observing, "Canibalism? To eat a moose and squirrel?"

The network brought an even more bizarre interpretation to a segment of "Fractured Fairy Tales" about a chicken who fell in love with a cat. NBC feared that it could be interpreted as suggesting interracial marriage — a taboo of the time. Ward didn't throw up his hands this time but instead just threw their objection out, stating, "It's funny and we're going to do it."

When NBC didn't want to give the show a better timeslot for the '62-'63 season (it had been up against the highly rated **Lassie**), General Mills offered the show to CBS, who was happy to offer a better spot. NBC caved in to the demands of the show's owner and gave it a renewal at an earlier time. When NBC was slow in admitting publicly that they had even renewed the show at all, Ward complained to the network and then released his own formal announcements, which read:

> "It is with great ennui and profound personal apathy that the National Broadcasting Company announces the renewal of **The Bullwinkle Show** for the 1962-36 TV season. **The Bullwinkle Show** will air at 5:30 P.M. On Sundays, a time slot once occupied by **Omnibus**. Oh, well, it's in color." The ascerbic announcement also stated, "We feel that the new time slot gives us the opportunity to fulfill our intellectual potential. Besides, it's better than not being on at all."

Ward was a great one for self-promotion and publicity stunts. His most famous was the "Sunset Boulevard Block Party" thrown in 1961 to unveil a statue of Rocky and Bullwinkle in front of the Jay Ward Studios at 8218 Sunset Blvd. in Hollywood. Sunset was closed off for blocks and straw hats with moose antlers were given to 3,000 people. Jayne Mansfield (later lampooned on the show as Jayne Moosefield) unveiled the statue. A little known fact is that the pose of the statue was a take-off on another statue which was standing across the street — one of some war hero or other. The other statue is long gone while Rocky and Bullwinkle remain where they were erected. But after years of exposure to the elements, the statue had begun to look much worse for the wear until fans clamored to have it refurbished or declared a landmark and moved to a museum. Finally Ward responded to pressure and had it repaired and repainted himself. "He realized there was a large coterie determined to get that statue repainted by hook or crook," said Bill Scott a couple years ago when all this was coming down, "and if he wanted to have a say in what colors, he'd better act fast!"

Sam Clayberger, one of Jay Ward Studio's color stylists, and his son, rebuilt Rocky and Bullwinkle and painted them in brilliant, day-glo colors. The statue remains as a monument to one of the most unique and creative cartoons in the history of animation. **CF**

**JAMES VAN HISE is the former editor of one of the oldest fanzines in the comic book field, author of The Art of Al Williamson and editor of Monsterland.**

# Games

BY STEVE PERRIN

## A DOUBLE MILESTONE

Our Sterling Editor wants me to do a special "anniversary" column since this is the 50th issue of **COMICS FEATURE**. What Happy Hal doesn't realize is that this is also an "anniversary" for me — my 20th column in this August publication. So roll out the champagne and let's celebrate two milestones by figuring out where the games scene is these days.

## PORTENTS OF...

About a month ago as I write this, I attended Origins 86, the annual games convention which travels all over the country from year to year. This year it was in Los Angeles — which makes things a bit more convenient for me than, for instance, Baltimore, where the convention has been more times than any other (and will be again in 1987).

Origins is always interesting for a games writer — no matter which side of the fence he writes from. Since I both write and critique games, I get input from every side, and the industry I see is moving further and further away from the one I knew five years ago.

Sure, a lot of things are the same, too. Ten years ago, board wargames were the core of the industry — roleplaying games were just getting started. Five years ago, wargames were still a strong contender, with new versions of tank versus tank or musket versus musket games coming out monthly. Now, West End Games is one of the few publishers of any size that is putting out new military games (I guess "military" sounds better than "war" these days) on such tried and true subjects as the Normandy Invasion (**St. Lo**), the American Civil War (**Chickamauga**), WWII fighter combat (**RAF**) and the North Africa Campaign (**Rommel in North Africa**). Apparently, none of these subjects can be handled so well that someone else doesn't think they can do it better.

Speaking of doing it better, TSR Inc. (publisher of D&D) is reissuing some of the SPI boardgames it got several years ago when it acquired SPI's assets. In particular, **Terrible Swift Sword** was hailed as a major design innovation when it came out about eight years ago — a small unit simulation of the battle of Gettysburg, with a huge map and vast quantities of counters. Since it was issued, many other games have been based on the system devised for it. Naturally, all these other games have improved on the original design. Now TSR has taken all those improvements and poured them into a quality reissue of **TSS** (as it is called in the industry). If there are any board gamers out there reading this, and you always wondered about the fuss about **TSS**, or have a copy that's falling apart, now's your chance to catch up.

Quite frankly, the cash flow for the reissue of a board game is not really very good, so TSR can only reissue those games with a big following, but I think they deserve a round of applause for trying to keep some giants of the past in print for the enjoyment of new gamers.

But these excursions into board game publishing are becoming rarer and rarer. Avalon Hill, the dean of war/adventure game publishers, which got into the roleplaying busines by publishing my own **RuneQuest** game, spent most of the last few months putting together and publishing the very popular **Dr. Ruth's Good Sex Game**, which doesn't really qualify as a board game. I suppose it's more of a roleplaying game — although I'll have to study it a bit to come to a decision.

The roleplaying genre has pretty much captured the field — an obvious trend five years ago which has just about come to its conclusion now. No major game publisher can exist without role playing games. TSR supports its board games with its roleplaying sales. Avalon Hill publishes role playing to shore up its boardgames, and looks for other places to diversify. West End uses **Paranoia** and now its **Ghostbusters** roleplaying games to keep its boardgames alive. Steve Jackson Games, which has depended on its semi-boardgame **Car Wars** and minigames like **Ogre** and **Illuminati** to keep itself going, has finally issued **GURPS**, the Generic Universal Role Playing System, which purports to cover all possible genres in one game.

(Industry rumor has it that the first two letters in the acronym originally stood for "Great Unnamed." One might think that the new title does not make a whole lot of difference.)

The other main companies in the industry are already roleplaying companies who might have a line of boardgames tacked on. About the only boardgame company left of any size is Game Designers Workshop, mostly known to the general game populace as the publishers of the roleplaying games **Traveller** and **Twilight 2000**.

## SO WHAT'S NEW IN ROLE PLAYING?

Roleplaying is dominating the market. So let's survey the field and see what's coming up that's new and different. Unfortunately, there doesn't seem to be *anything* that's really new and different. Sure, lots of new products are coming out, but the contents are not new in the way the game is played. However, many of these products are interesting on their own.

The various games and game supplements reflect their creators. A friend who helped write the bylaws of three different organizations once said that each set acted as a guide to the problems that that organization had had to face before writing the bylaws. Each group of writers attempted to solve their particular problems, and ignored the problems addressed by the other two groups because those problems had not come up among *their* members.

So it is with game and supplement writing. Each writer wants to deal with those items he knows are problems or interesting sidelines, and ignores the concerns of other writers. I've certainly done this myself....

## HIGH-SPEED INTERVIEW

As I write this anniversary column, I have recently returned from the 1986 Origins convention, held from July 3 to July 6 in Los Angeles. The trip down proved illuminating.

I arranged with George MacDonald of Hero Games to drive to the convention together. As it happened, former Hero Games partner Ray Greer, who now spends his time in Texas toiling for the Steve Jackson Games company, popped into town and arranged to ride down with us. Suddenly I had two birds with one drive. Interview possibilities were obvious, we were all trapped in the same car.

The only hitch in this plan was the lack of technological backup. The high-tech recording device I have access to is a lined yellow pad and a pocket of pens. Thus, you are not to be treated to a line-for-line interview such as are found in various magazines now banned at your favorite convenience store. Instead, think of this as a short biographical essay on how two average California boys became genuine game moguls.

## HOW IT BEGAN — THE MACDONALD VERSION

For George MacDonald, the first glimmering of his gamewriting career appeared at 10, in 1970. The mother of his best friend at the time found a copy of **Tactics II**, Avalon Hill's original wargame, at a Garage Sale for 50 cents. She bought it for her son, and George and his friend began to play it. They rapidly came to the conclusion that the setup and play of the game took too long, so they invented new games based on it.

Shortly thereafter, the two burgeoning young gamers discovered a club of older boys who played the Avalon Hill games regularly. The two youngsters were accepted immediately as possible opponents, and cut a niche for themselves in the group. They might not be as good as the older boys, but they were enthusiastic and could put up a good fight.

As he entered his teens, George lost track of his friend when they entered different schools, and the games club had broken up. However, he rediscovered gaming when he met Glenn Thain and Bruce Harlick as a freshman in high school.

Shortly thereafter, in late 1974 or early 1975, a friend gave Bruce his copy of **Dungeons and Dragons** rules, and George discovered role playing.

Just like many schools today, George's high school had a programmed format that often meant a lot of time between classes. This was ideal for ongoing D&D games. The game group rapidly learned (as so many of us were doing at that time) that the written rules for D&D were not complete. Many things were left for the gamer to figure out. George credits another member of the group, Kirby Loo, with initially throwing out all the monster and treasure rules so that the players actually had no idea of what was going to happen, no matter how many times they read the rules.

George ran afoul of some other rules, though. High schools are notoriously unfond of gambling, and all these kids sitting around rolling dice bothered the school authorities. George found himself hauled before the vice principal because he had a bag full of dice. He managed to talk his way clear when he showed the polyhedral dice necessary for D&D and asked how he could possibly be gambling with them.

## ENTER RAY GREER

In the meantime, Ray Greer was learning how to play games at his brother's knee. Randy Greer, about ten years older than Ray, was already interested in gaming when he found himself having to deal with living in the same room as a four-year-old. Complex Avalon-Hill games were out of the question, but Ray picked up on less challenging games like **Risk** just fine.

In 1977, Ray was heavily involved in theatre and needed some work done in the electrical department of the school he was in. While there he found many of the crew playing D&D. Fascinated, he rushed into playing himself, dragging a couple of other theater people with him. The play developed into a 50/50 split between role playing and dice rolling, but the role playing became more and more dominant.

At one point during a 20 hour role-playing session, the group heard a sudden crash; each player picked up something to hit with and they searched the house for the interloper. Fortunately, it was just a cat. Ray still wonders about the fate of a "burglar" had they found one. He broke away from this group shortly thereafter. There is such a thing as getting too involved in role playing.

Then Ray ran into Glenn Thain (a gentleman who has been responsible for the gaming careers of far more people than just those chronicled here), and found himself gaming with Glenn, Bruce Harlick and George. It was a good year to get into gaming. A lot of new stuff was happening and he found himself playing such brand new games as **Empire of the Petal Throne** (the first time he played with tin and lead miniatures), **Traveller** and (ahem) **RuneQuest**.

## THE GERMINATION OF CHAMPIONS

In and amongst his gaming activiites, George got back into reading comic books in high school. His consumption was fairly irregular until he moved to San Jose to go to college. There, he found a comic book store.

Simultaneously, he found that he couldn't play as often at college, beause all of his playing friends were in San Mateo. He would make weekend excursions back to the old homestead just to play games and get his laundry done. In-class, he would make copious game notes on the margins of his notebooks.

Somewhere along the line another friend, Doug Garrett, began running D&D games in which the action got quite graphic. Doug is an excellent storyteller, and his depiction of amputations, eviscerations and beheadings began to make George realize just what he and his friends were simulating. When George went back to his San Jose apartment after running a D&D game in which about half the entire party was slain by his monsters, he was elated in his success, then depressed about what he was happy about.

George needed a game in which the death of enemies was not the main goal. Comic books is an obvious medium that actively discourages such doings. The idea is to capture the supervillain, not decapitate him and put his head on a pike over the castle wall. But how could he run a game using comic book heroes.

At that time, there were two rules sets out for superhero adventures. One was the original, **Superhero 2044**. It's rather murky game mechanics and freeform character generation did not inspire George with much hope. The other was the original rules for FGU's **Villains and Vigilantes**, which featured an overly complex (but comprehensible) game system and random acquisition of super powers. Like me, George has always had a problem with dice. Every attempt he made to randomly generate a superhero led to Captain Wimp. V&V was not the answer, either.

George credits a lecture given at an early DunDraCon by gamer Wayne Shaw with inspiring the main concept of **Champions**: set point values for skills and powers. Wayne had done something similar with **Superhero 2044** and George saw that this was the answer to his problem. The player gets a certain amount of points to spend and can use them to create just the character he wants. The popularity of this device with many other game designers who use variations on it in their own products shows how right on the money George was with this idea.

After writing up 13 pages of playtest rules, George took them to Glenn Thain's house for a weekend of gaming in early 1979. Players Glenn and Vern Turner loved it. George made many copies and others got hold of them, including his eventual co-author, Steve Peterson.

Over the summer of 1979, while George was home in San Mateo, the whole gaming group "fixed" the rules. It was run time after time and all the bugs were theoretically shaken out of it. George's San Jose roommate, Steve Goodman, was especially helpful. Steve is the sort of player that any playtest needs. He enjoys ferreting out all the loopholes in a set of rules and manipulating them to show how outrageous they can get. He is commemorated for this ability in the **Champions II** supplement. Therein are a series of short pieces entitled "Goodman Says" which show how to manipulate the character generation rules to the best effect.

## ENTER RAY GREER, AGAIN

About this time, Ray Greer was in Southern California, studying business and theatre. He had little time for formal role playing, but engaged in a lot of live-action role playing to keep his hand in.

In 1980, he came home and attended a Pacificon game convention over Labor Day. He found his old friends were running games of a new thing they called **Champions**. Bored at the moment, he sat down to play for want of anything better to do. He spent the rest of the convention trying to find more **Champions** runs to get into. The game was "different and easy to learn," and encouraged the player to act within the genre of comic books. He, and many others who participated in those early convention playtests, loved it on sight. Everyone wanted a copy of the much-photocopied rules.

By this time, George and Steve Peterson knew they had a hit on their hands. They couldn't afford to just keep photocopying the rules and handing them out. The obvious thing to do was to publish the game and formally sell it to the hundreds (or thousands, as it turned out) of gamers who were looking for what they had. But what did they have?

## WHAT THEY HAD WAS THE HERO SYSTEM

George and Steve sat down to determine "what are we selling." They decided that what they were selling was what they liked to play. The good guys generally win, everyone is distinctive and has something to offer, there is not a lot of blood. The combat movement and fighting is based on the hex grid familiar to wargamers because it encourages movement, just like in the comics. The system encourages movement and colorful action.

For the most part, they succeeded. Their first effort was difficult to understand in its entirety, but many people still found it inspiring and just what they wanted. Later versions are quite explicit and describe the rules easily. Through the many versions produced, they have kept the relatively bloodless approach, and that's one of the main appeals of the game.

Even their **Fantasy Hero** and **Danger International** games, which depict genres more given to blood and death than comic books, still give the player characters ample opportunities to survive, perhaps more than a "realistic" game should. But that's what the Heroes stand for in the gaming industry, and they like it that way.

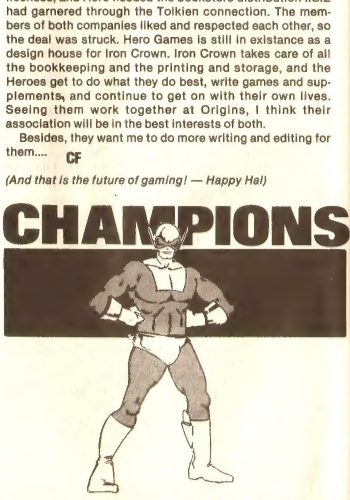
## THE CURRENT SITUATION

Now, Hero Games as an independant entity is no more. After five years of attempting to make it as a game company, George and Steve and Ray, who joined as a partner later, decided that they could make a success of it, but only at the expense of their other plans in life.

Iron Crown Enterprises was the final solution. I.C.E. wanted more product to push besides their popular Tolkien licenses, and Hero needed the bookstore distribution I.C.E had garnered through the Tolkien connection. The members of both companies liked and respected each other, so the deal was struck. Hero Games is still in existance as a design house for Iron Crown. Iron Crown takes care of all the bookkeeping and the printing and storage, and the Heroes get to do what they do best, write games and supplements, and continue to get on with their own lives. Seeing them work together at Origins, I think their association will be in the best interests of both.

Besides, they want me to do more writing and editing for them.... **CF**

*(And that is the future of gaming! — Happy Hal)*




**STEVE PERRIN is the creator of the Elfquest, RuneQuest and Superworld games along with scores of modules and other related material.**

HEH, HEH YOU CANT PLAY THE GAME IF YOU DONT KNOW THE SCORE, KIDDIES
COMICS FEATURE
— THE FIRST FIFTY —
DONT MISS OUR NEXT 50
JIM KEEGAN 86